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Mardi
6 juin 2023

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 6 June 2023

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 6 juin 2023

The House recessed from 1213 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I'm very proud to be introducing to the House two esteemed guests who have joined us this afternoon: Mikaela Lily Davies, who is an actor, a coach and a performer, as well as Theresa Tova, the former past president of ACTRA. Welcome to your House.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

ONTARIO CONSUMER
WATCHDOG ACT, 2023
LOI DE 2023
SUR L'ORGANISME ONTARIEN
DE DÉFENSE DU CONSOMMATEUR

Mr. Rakocevic moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 122, An Act to provide for the development and implementation of a plan to establish a consumer watchdog organization / *Projet de loi 122, Loi prévoyant l'élaboration et la mise en oeuvre d'un plan visant à créer un organisme de défense du consommateur.*

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'll invite the member to briefly explain his bill.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: The bill enacts the Ontario Consumer Watchdog Act, 2023. The act requires the minister, in consultation with relevant stakeholders and the public, to develop and implement a plan to establish an independent consumer watchdog organization that is responsible for overseeing consumer protection matters in Ontario. The act provides that the plan shall include the steps the minister intends to take to establish the organization, the powers and duties of the organization, the role of the organization in relation to other regulatory bodies and such other matters as the minister considers advisable. The minister must publish the plan on a government of Ontario website, as well as prepare and table a progress report on the plan in the Legislative Assembly.

ERIN'S LAW (CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE
PREVENTION AND REPORTING), 2023
LOI ERIN DE 2023 SUR LA PRÉVENTION
ET LE SIGNALEMENT DES MAUVAIS
TRAITEMENTS D'ORDRE SEXUEL
À L'ÉGARD DES ENFANTS

Mr. Quinn moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 123, An Act to amend the Education Act with respect to child sexual abuse prevention and reporting / *Projet de loi 123, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'éducation concernant la prévention et le signalement des mauvais traitements d'ordre sexuel à l'égard des enfants.*

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry care to briefly explain his bill?

Mr. Nolan Quinn: Erin's Law, the bill that amends the Education Act to require each school board to establish a policy under which pupils in its schools are engaged annually, in a developmentally appropriate manner, regarding the topics of child sexual abuse prevention and reporting. Each board is also required to make information available to parents and guardians and to provide information annually to teachers and other staff at schools. The minister is authorized to make regulations respecting how these requirements are to be satisfied.

STOPPING THE MISUSE
OF NON-DISCLOSURE
AGREEMENTS ACT, 2023

LOI DE 2023 VISANT
À METTRE FIN À L'UTILISATION
D'ACCORDS DE NON-DIVULGATION
À MAUVAIS ESCIENT

MPP Wong-Tam moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 124, An Act to regulate the use of non-disclosure agreements relating to discrimination, harassment, sexual harassment and sexual assault / *Projet de loi 124, Loi visant à réglementer les accords de non-divulgence liés à la discrimination, au harcèlement, sexuel ou autre, et aux agressions sexuelles.*

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the member for Toronto Centre care to explain their bill.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I would be proud to, Speaker. Thank you very much.

This bill enacts the Stopping the Misuse of Non-Disclosure Agreements Act, 2023. The act prohibits any party responsible, defined in the act as the person who has an obligation in the law to take reasonable steps to prevent discrimination, harassment, sexual harassment or sexual assault in the place where one or more of these happened or is alleged to have happened, from entering into a non-disclosure agreement with a relevant person, defined in the act as the person who has experienced or made an allegation of one of the underlying acts, if the non-disclosure agreement has the purpose or effect of concealing the details of the incident.

The act includes an exception for situations in which the relevant person expressly wishes to enter into an agreement. The act sets out requirements for such an agreement to be enforceable as well as limits on such an agreement.

Section 3 of the act prohibits non-disclosure agreements between the party responsible and the person who committed or is alleged to have committed the underlying act if the purpose of that non-disclosure agreement is preventing a lawful investigation into a complaint of harassment or discrimination.

LIFE LEASES ACT, 2023

LOI DE 2023 SUR LES BAUX VIAGERS

Ms. Khanjin moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 125, An Act respecting life leases / Projet de loi 125, Loi traitant des baux viagers.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the member like to explain her bill.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: This bill is dedicated to the many seniors in my community and around Ontario who live in life-lease communities.

The bill authorizes certain payments in respect to life leases and requires the disclosure of information relating to life leases.

BAN IGAMING ADVERTISING ACT, 2023

LOI DE 2023 INTERDISANT LA PUBLICITÉ POUR LES JEUX EN LIGNE

Madame Gélinas moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 126, An Act to prohibit advertising for online gambling sites / Projet de loi 126, Loi interdisant la publicité pour les sites de jeux en ligne.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the member like to briefly explain her bill.

M^{me} France Gélinas: This bill is co-sponsored by the following MPPs: Monique Taylor from Hamilton Mountain, Lisa Gretzky from Windsor West and Tom Rakocevic from Humber River–Black Creek.

The bill is quite simple. The act prohibits the promotion of online gambling sites by means of advertising, with the same restriction that applies to cigarettes and alcohol advertising. Any person who contravenes the act is guilty of an offence and on conviction is liable to a fine of at least \$25,000 but no more than \$1 million.

1510

PETITIONS

HEALTH CARE WORKERS

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have these petitions that come from all over: Toronto, the GTA, Brantford, Hamilton, Ottawa, Sudbury, North Bay, Thunder Bay—all over Ontario. It's a "Petition for Better Staffing, Better Wages and Better Care in Ontario's Public Hospitals."

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas registered nurses and health care professionals are the backbone of Ontario's public health care system; and

"Whereas nurses and health care professionals are fighting for better staffing, better wages and better care in Ontario's public hospitals; and

"Whereas the government has the power to direct the funding and priorities for the Ontario Hospital Association in this bargaining process;"

They "petition the Legislative Assembly ... as follows:

"Support nurses and health care professionals represented by the Ontario Nurses' Association in their collective bargaining with the Ontario Hospital Association (OHA) by demanding the OHA reach a negotiated agreement with nurses that results in better staffing, better wages and better care in Ontario's public hospitals."

I support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask my good page Christopher to bring it to the Clerk.

SCHOOL BOARDS

Mr. Will Bouma: This petition says:

"Whereas the basics of reading, writing, and mathematics are fundamental for student achievement; and too many school boards are jeopardizing student achievement by straying away from teaching the basics of reading, writing, and mathematics; and parents are being bullied and denied representation at school board meetings, and trustees are being bullied by other trustees;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario authorize the Minister of Education to set provincial priorities in

education in the area of student achievement, and authorize the Minister of Education to issue policies and guidelines setting out the training to be completed by board members, directors of education, supervisory officers and superintendents, and require boards to adopt codes of conduct that apply to members of the board.”

I fully support this petition, will affix my name thereon and pass it to page Raisha.

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

Ms. Sandy Shaw: During Pride Month of June here in Ontario, it is my honour to read a petition entitled, “Support the Gender Affirming Health Care Act.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas two-spirit, transgender, non-binary, gender-diverse, and intersex communities face significant challenges to accessing health care services that are friendly, competent, and affirming in Ontario;

“Whereas everyone deserves access to health care, and they shouldn’t have to fight for it, shouldn’t have to wait for it, and should never receive less care or support because of who they are;

“Whereas gender-affirming care is life-saving care;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam’s private member’s bill—the Gender Affirming Health Care Advisory Committee Act to improve access to and coverage for gender-affirming health care in Ontario.”

I’m going to add my name to this important petition and will give it to Silas to take to the table.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr. Mike Schreiner: These petitions from Dr. Sally Palmer keep rolling in.

“To Raise Social Assistance Rates.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario’s social assistance rates are well below Canada’s official Market Basket Measure poverty line and far from adequate to cover the rising costs of food and rent: \$733 for individuals on OW and \$1,227 for ODSP;

“Whereas an open letter to the Premier and two cabinet ministers, signed by over 230 organizations, recommends that social assistance rates be doubled for both Ontario Works (OW) and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP);

“Whereas the recent small budget increase of 5% for ODSP still leaves these citizens below the poverty line, both they and those receiving the frozen OW rates are struggling to live in this time of alarming inflation;

“Whereas the government of Canada recognized in its CERB program that a ‘basic income’ of \$2,000 per month was the standard support required by individuals who lost their employment during the pandemic;

“We, the undersigned citizens of Ontario, petition the Legislative Assembly to double social assistance rates for OW and ODSP.”

I fully support this petition, will sign it and ask page Dina to bring it to the table.

POLICE FUNDING

Mr. Aris Babikian: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas police provide protection to some of the most vulnerable members of our society; and

“The provincial government has launched the Guns, Gangs and Violence Reduction Strategy; and

“The 2023-24 budget commits an additional \$13.4 million to this strategy;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario reject the ‘defund the police’ position, and continue funding police, seizing illegal guns, suppressing gangs, and supporting victims of violence through the Guns, Gangs and Violence Reduction Strategy.”

I wholeheartedly support this petition. I will affix my signature to it and give it to page Amara.

YOUTH JUSTICE SYSTEM FUNDING

MPP Lise Vaugeois: “Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas when a young person is charged for a serious criminal offence and is held in a place of open or secure detention or custody at a youth justice facility; and

“Whereas funding is provided to both young offender facilities in the OPS and transfer payment agencies by the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services; and

“Whereas the compensation and working conditions of OPS youth justice facilities and transfer payment agencies are markedly different, favouring OPS facilities despite both service structures servicing the same youth and facing the same workplace hazards; and

“Whereas workers in transfer payment agencies designed by the minister to operate open and/or secure custody and/or temporary detention settings are consistently overlooked when legislation is introduced for worker protection(s) such as, but not limited to, the Ontario’s first responders act to prevent or mitigate the risk of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and provide first responders with faster access to treatment and require their employers to implement PTSD prevention plans in their policies; and

“Whereas workers in transfer payment agencies are not automatically covered by the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act similar to their public service co-workers;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“We strongly urge the provision of a provincial mandate for all workers as designated under the Child and Family Services Act who work in a secured or open

custody facility or temporary detention setting funded by a transfer payment to provide coverage under the WSIB; and

“We further urge the Assembly to improve and eliminate systemic inequities by ensuring that all youth justice facilities receive proper funding and equitable standards in regards to wages, benefits and health and safety policies, training and equipment to protect and serve our province’s young people while in custody.”

I fully support this petition and will give it to Shlokh to deliver.

POLICE FUNDING

Mr. Anthony Leardi: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas police provide protection to some of the most vulnerable members of our society; and

“The provincial government has launched the Guns, Gangs and Violence Reduction Strategy; and

“The 2023-24 budget commits an additional \$13.4 million to this strategy;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario reject the ‘defund the police’ position, and continue funding police, seizing illegal guns, suppressing gangs, and supporting victims of violence through the Guns, Gangs and Violence Reduction Strategy.”

I support this petition. I will sign it and give it to page Arisa for delivery to the Clerk.

1520

EDUCATION FUNDING

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ford government cut funding to our schools by \$800 per student during the pandemic period, and plans to cut an additional \$6 billion to our schools over the next six years;

“Whereas these massive cuts have resulted in larger class sizes, reduced special education and mental health supports and resources for our students, and neglected and unsafe buildings;

“Whereas the Financial Accountability Office reported a \$2.1-billion surplus in 2021-22, and surpluses growing to \$8.5 billion in 2027-28, demonstrating there is more than enough money to fund a robust public education system;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to:

“—immediately reverse the cuts to our schools;

“—fix the inadequate education funding formula;

“—provide schools the funding to ensure the supports necessary to address the impacts of the pandemic on our students;

“—make the needed investments to provide smaller class sizes, increased levels of staffing to support our

students’ special education, mental health, English language learner and wraparound supports needs, and safe and healthy buildings and classrooms.”

I’m proud to affix my signature to this petition and send it to the table with page Evelyn.

POLICE FUNDING

Mr. Will Bouma: This petition reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas police provide protection to some of the most vulnerable members of our society; and

“The provincial government has launched the Guns, Gangs and Violence Reduction Strategy; and

“The 2023-24 budget commits an additional \$13.4 million to this strategy;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario reject the ‘defund the police’ position, and continue funding police, seizing illegal guns, suppressing gangs, and supporting victims of violence through the Guns, Gangs and Violence Reduction Strategy.”

I fully support this petition, will affix my signature to it and give it to page Raisha, again, to bring to the table.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I’m proud to read this petition submitted by the Elementary Teachers of Toronto.

“Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario from the Elementary Teachers of Toronto to Stop the Cuts and Invest in the Schools Our Students Deserve.

“Whereas the Ford government cut funding to our schools by \$800 per student during the pandemic period, and plans to cut an additional \$6 billion to our schools over the next six years;

“Whereas these massive cuts have resulted in larger class sizes, reduced special education and mental health supports and resources for our students, and neglected and unsafe buildings;

“Whereas the Financial Accountability Office reported a \$2.1-billion surplus in 2021-22, and surpluses growing to \$8.5 billion in 2027-28, demonstrating there is more than enough money to fund a robust public education system;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to:

“—immediately reverse the cuts to our schools;

“—fix the inadequate education funding formula;

“—provide schools the funding to ensure the supports necessary to address the impacts of the pandemic on our students;

“—make the needed investments to provide smaller class sizes, increased levels of staffing to support our students’ special education, mental health, English language learner and wraparound supports needs, and safe and healthy buildings and classrooms.”

I will be signing this petition and giving it to page Amara to send to the desk.

POLICE FUNDING

Mr. Rob Flack: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas police provide protection to some of the most vulnerable members of our society; and

“The provincial government has launched the Guns, Gangs and Violence Reduction Strategy; and

“The 2023-24 budget commits an additional \$13.4 million to this strategy;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario reject the ‘defund the police’ position, and continue funding police, seizing illegal guns, suppressing gangs, and supporting victims of violence through the Guns, Gangs and Violence Reduction Strategy.”

I sign my signature and give it to page Cyndi for delivery to the front.

NORTHERN HEALTH TRAVEL GRANT

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Jean Leduc from Val Caron in my riding for this petition.

“Let’s Fix the Northern Health Travel Grant

“Whereas people in the north are not getting the same access to health care because of the high cost of travel and accommodations;

“Whereas by refusing to raise the Northern Health Travel Grant (NHTG) rates, the Ford government is putting a massive burden on northern Ontarians who are sick;

“Whereas gas prices cost more in northern Ontario;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly “to establish a committee with a mandate to fix and improve the NHTG;

“This NHTG advisory committee would bring together health care providers in the north, as well as recipients of the NHTG to make recommendations to the Minister of Health that would improve access to health care in northern Ontario through adequate reimbursement of travel costs.”

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask my good page Dina to bring it to the Clerk.

POLICE FUNDING

Ms. Laura Smith: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas police provide protection to some of the most vulnerable members of our society; and

“The provincial government has launched the Guns, Gangs and Violence Reduction Strategy; and

“The 2023-24 budget commits an additional \$13.4 million to this strategy;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario reject the ‘defund the police’ position, and continue funding police, seizing illegal guns, suppressing gangs, and supporting victims of violence through the Guns, Gangs and Violence Reduction Strategy.”

I fully support this petition, and I will sign it and give it to page Solomon to take to the table.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time we have for petitions this afternoon.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

STRENGTHENING SAFETY AND MODERNIZING JUSTICE ACT, 2023

LOI DE 2023 SUR LE RENFORCEMENT DE LA SÉCURITÉ ET LA MODERNISATION DE LA JUSTICE

Resuming the debate adjourned on June 6, 2023, on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

Bill 102, An Act to amend various Acts relating to the justice system, fire protection and prevention and animal welfare / Projet de loi 102, Loi modifiant diverses lois relatives au système judiciaire, à la prévention et à la protection contre l’incendie ainsi qu’au bien-être des animaux.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): When we last debated this bill, the member for Kiiwetinoong had made his presentation, and we’re now doing questions to the member for Kiiwetinoong with respect to that speech.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Confidence in policing is always important—it’s an important feature of policing—but especially so for Indigenous communities. We know that in Thunder Bay the police services board is still under administration and there have been a lot of problems there. We also know communities in the north—for example, the communities of Pickle Lake, Sioux Lookout and Kenora have formed a hub for policing because of the significant costs. All of this requires oversight.

So my question to you is—the fact that this bill does away with the OPP Governance Advisory Council, which would have had representation from community and would help to advise policing, especially, as I said, like small and rural communities and, very often, First Nations communities. Can the member explain how cancelling this kind of oversight body that would have given the community input is not helpful when it comes to building confidence in policing services?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch to the member for the question. Kiiwetinoong is a very unique riding. It’s about 300,000 square kilometres. When we talk about police services, it’s serviced by four police services: Lac Seul Police, Treaty Three Police, Nishnawbe Aski Police Service and OPP.

What happens in the north, when we talk about their systems, the justice system has three systems: one is the

police, one is the corrections, and also the court system. Sometimes, when people get involved in the justice system, there are needless deaths and unnecessary suffering that happens to these people. So I think that oversight is very needed and it should not be removed. Meegwetch.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

Mr. Todd J. McCarthy: This bill, some may say, is about law and order, but another phrase for law and order is “peace and harmony” or “peace, order and good government.” Now, Strengthening Safety and Modernizing Justice, which is the name of this bill—and the bill that is proposed to be enacted will help facilitate the proclamation in force of the CPSA—is focused on making Ontario safer in all aspects: policing, fire prevention and protection, justice and animal welfare across every riding of this province, including Indigenous communities.

On that basis, as it has thoughtfully supported some of our bills, will the opposition support this government’s multi-faceted approach to keeping our province safe and promoting peace, order, good government and harmony?

1530

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: I think some of the stuff I can support which has a benefit to the riding of Kiiwetinoong, which has a benefit to the safety of the people who live in Kiiwetinoong. I’m going to read a quote. This is from the Treaty Three Police president, or the chief: “We simply do not have enough officers to have officers in every one of our 23 communities. The majority of the communities are unpoliced because the officers are in another First Nation community.”

I’ve done ride-alongs in Treaty 3. They have six officers to service 23 First Nations. That does not help. We need more funding. We are not a program, but they are a program. It has to be recognized as an essential service. I think those are the kinds of bills I can support. Meegwetch.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: To the member from Kiiwetinoong: Really, I see that there’s an elimination of the Ontario Provincial Police Governance Advisory Council, and I also know how important external reviews of policing have been, particularly in Thunder Bay. I wonder if you could speak to those concerns.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Back where I come from, in Kiiwetinoong, our children, grades 9 to 12—they have to leave their First Nation community, they have to leave their families to attend high school. Where do they go? They go to Sioux Lookout. Where do they go? They go to Thunder Bay.

Back in 2001 to 2011, guess what happened to seven of our students? They went missing. Where were they found? In a river in Thunder Bay. They never came home. I think the investigations did not happen properly because of who they were, because they look like me. That’s unacceptable. We need to be able to have that oversight to be able to do that. Oversight matters because history tells us people—it’s hard, but we need that oversight.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: The member mentioned that oversight matters, but what I think matters as well is access to the profession of policing. I just looked up, actually, on the Internet, and I see that there are nine independent First Nation police services in Ontario.

My question to the member is, does he think that us removing the requirement to have a post-secondary college or university diploma will actually enable members of his community and other First Nations and Indigenous communities in Ontario to go into the profession of policing so, as he says, we have better representation, especially in these nine independent First Nation police services in Ontario?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: I talked about this gentleman, Mr. Mosquito; he’s been off work for years because he’s seen too many things happen. We need to be able to support them, support the OPP, because I was there when he was telling me goodbye, when he was going to kill himself. I was on the phone with him. I think we need to support officers like that, because they see so much. I’m sure the officer here—MPP Dowie used to be an OPP officer—knows that.

I think there’s so much we can do. The biggest room in the world is the room for improvement, and I think you can start with Indigenous policing where it’s not just a program, but it should be an essential service, like the rest of Ontario. Meegwetch.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We’re going to move to further debate.

Mr. John Vanthof: It’s always an honour to be able to rise in the Legislature and, today, to talk about Bill 102, Strengthening Safety and Modernizing Justice Act. I’ve listened to most of this debate—some of it through the TV; some of it in the House.

It’s Tuesday afternoon. It’s the last week of the Legislature. I think we can be honest that not all of us want to be here right now. No, we want to be here—we love this place—but we’re all feeling it, so I don’t think I’m going to follow some of my notes.

But I’m going to tell a story—I’m only here probably because I can tell stories, but this is not a happy one, and it’s a very personal one for me. It’s actually the reason why I’m an MPP.

I’d like to start off—I have ultimate respect for police and first responders. I couldn’t do what they do. But they’re human and humans sometimes don’t always treat other humans the way they perceive they should be treated. I’ve mentioned my father a few times in this Legislature. My father died in a farming accident. When I found him in the field lying on his back, there was no blood. He had a small dent on the side of his head. It was August 5, 1989, around 4:30 in the afternoon. That was before cellphones—or at least I didn’t have a cellphone—so I ran across the road, and the lady called 911. I came back and she came back—she was a PSW and she felt his pulse. It was mere minutes and the ambulance came, sirens wailing, one, two, three police cars—just like TV. I remember thinking it’s just like TV. It’s working just like TV. The ambulance pulled into the field, he jumped out

and he looked at my father and said there's nothing we can do. That was the call they made. Then all the sirens stopped, the flashing lights stopped and they—this isn't like the movies. They pulled a blue tarp out of the back of the ambulance. They started at his feet and unrolled the tarp over his body.

That is the first time that I ever—I ran a farm. I worked for my dad. I had never stood up to authority in my life, and when they got to his neck, I said, “Stop. If my father is going to die today, he's going to die with his face in the sun.” The paramedic came to me and said—he knew me; it was a small town—“No, no, no, that's nerves.” I said, “No, no. I'm a farm kid. I've seen things die. He might be dying. He might die in this field, but he's not dead.” We waited for 10 minutes. Three cops, two paramedics, the lady who took his pulse—she said, “John, what do we do with your mom?” I said, “Well, the ambulance is here. Take her to the hospital. We'll meet her at the hospital.” Ten minutes, and then he shuddered and he stopped breathing. Then they looked at me, and I nodded. And they covered his head.

I didn't go to him because I was too—I'm not going to swear. I was too busy staring down those cops and the paramedics because they just tried to cover my father's face while he was still breathing. That was at 4:30, and we waited and waited. It was a really hot day, and we waited and waited and waited, and a big cloud came over and all of a sudden the lights turned on, my dad went to the back of the ambulance and I got shoved in the front, and we all went to the hospital.

1540

We thought we all went to the hospital. When I got to the hospital, I looked at the clock and it was 6 o'clock. My dad had been lying there since 4:30. My mom, in that little hospital, was waiting. I walked in and my mom asked how her husband was, how my father was. I'm the one who told her that he died in the field over an hour ago. Do you know what? There was no police, no paramedic, no one—no one.

Do you know the first time the police called my mom to contact her after her husband had been killed in an accident or that I had been contacted after standing in the field watching it? Three days later. She got a call from the police the day of my dad's funeral to ask if my dad had life insurance. That's the only question the police asked.

I have ultimate respect for police and first responders—I do, I do, but at that time? I thought to myself, “You know what? I'm just a farm kid standing in a field. If that was a mayor lying there, it might have been different on that long weekend. If it was anybody important, it might have been different on that long weekend, but it was just an old farmer.” That's why I'm standing here because I always stick up for it.

I have never disputed that my dad was going to die in that field—never, ever, ever—but I've never gotten a straight answer why there was no coroner there, why no one told my mom. That's not like the movies either, where the son has to go and—there was nobody. That's why I pushed so hard to get somebody to look into it, if

something happened with—my dad made a mistake, but something with that tractor was wrong, too. I pushed and pushed, and nobody wanted to investigate, including the farm implements tribunal—I'm glad the Minister of Agriculture is here; I really get along with her.

I got a letter back—I have a hard time telling this story—from the farm implements tribunal saying, “I'm sorry for your dad, but your dad, your father or whatever got off the tractor while it was running, so that is his fault.” Okay.

So I called the chair of the farm implements tribunal back—and he was a dairy farmer. I can't remember his name, but he was very respectful. I said, “So you have a dairy farm as I do.” He said, “Yes.” “Okay, so you have upright silos like I do?” “Yes.” I said, “So when you're filling those silos”—and the Minister of Agriculture will know exactly what I'm talking about—“you've got a stationary tractor with the blower. Do you have somebody sitting on the tractor all the time?” “Of course not.” I said, “Well then, how did they get on and off?” I asked him, “Do you have a grain auger?” “Yes.” I said, “Do you have somebody sitting on that stationary tractor all the time?” “Of course not.” And I said, “Why did you send me this BS letter then?”

I got busy, and life passed. I would say a year and a half later, maybe two years later, I got a call from a lawyer in Texas. What happened in Texas is a 12-year-old kid on exactly the same model of tractor went to shut the tractor off on a grain auger because the wagon was empty, his father had sent him to shut the tractor off, and he never came back. Somehow that lawyer had found my letter, and I testified via phone in that court in Texas and then they fixed the tractor. They actually pulled that model off. It wasn't a big deal. But if they had investigated that when that old man had gotten killed, do you know what? They might not have lost that 12-year-old kid and who know how many other kids and people.

I have a lot of respect for first responders. I couldn't do it. Honestly, I know that. There's more to the story—and I know I couldn't be a first responder. I have ultimate respect. But first responders, police officers and paramedics face stress that none of the rest of us do. I faced that stress once in my life. But because they face things like that, they also need a strong oversight body. Because I did everything I could to wake somebody up and I didn't know anything about how to do it, and I was rebuffed more than once by the police. At no point did I ever say—the argument was never about what happened. I wanted to know how it happened, so we could fix that.

That tractor—I went to the local dealership. It was a pretty new tractor. We took the same model—a brand-new tractor—reefed the parking brake, stood back and touched that gearshift with a stick and it took off. And everybody looked the other way.

I'm going to be upfront. Like I said—I've said it, I think, five times—I have ultimate respect for police, but I have a hard time discussing policing. I'm going to be upfront.

But this one confuses me. That's where I come from. Like I said, I have ultimate respect, but this one confuses

me. I just heard a member ask a question to my colleague, “Won’t this bill increase the number of police officers?” We’re short the police officers. I have a detachment in Matheson that just closed—a big problem for the community. I have a detachment in Noëlville where they’re fighting to keep it open. We need more police officers. I have a problem with the question, “Won’t this bill bring more police officers?” Actually, it’s kind of confusing because in the bill that it’s changing, that part was never enacted. So it has never been the case in Ontario that you’ve needed more than a secondary education to apply to police college. It has never been the case. So now they’re changing it to make that permanent, but it’s never been the case. So how is making it permanent going to bring more police officers? I don’t understand that. I really, really don’t.

I think I can speak for my party on this: We have no problem with lived experience being part of something to qualify to be a police officer because lived experience—I just talked a bit about lived experience—changes your life and makes you a better person or maybe a worse person, but lived experience is very important. I think lived experience should qualify for something. I really do.

In this bill, it was sold by the Premier that this was going to put more—I don’t like the term “boots on the ground,” but I understand the term. This was going to put more boots on the ground—specifically, that clause. How? I’ve talked to several officers, and the first thing they said was, “Well, wait a second. It’s not a requirement now. It has never been enacted.” Yes, I know. So that one confuses me a bit.

1550

I’ve listened to this debate quite a bit, and another one that I don’t understand is, a couple of the government questions come really like, “If you don’t vote for this, you don’t support police; you don’t support?”—that’s quite a stretch, and I’ll give you an example of how it’s quite a stretch.

A couple of days ago, another bill went through the House—and I’m not great with the numbers. It was the bill that had the—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Trial and training.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes. The bill that had trial and training, to train dogs to hunt. I remember standing in this place and saying that the former Premier of the province, Mike Harris, grandfathered it so that you wouldn’t be able to give the licences anymore for this practice, which was too barbaric for Mike Harris. That this government is going to revive it—and they did, and the members voted for it, but because they voted for it, I would never say—I’m going to say it now, but I would never say it—that the people who voted for it must hate wild animals, because that’s not the case.

It’s kind of interesting, because this bill has got a lot of stuff about the PAWS Act. The PAWS Act is very important. If I recall, we all voted unanimously for the PAWS Act. The PAWS Act covers domestic animals like—are pets domestic animals?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Yes.

Mr. John Vanthof: Domestic animals and farm animals. They’re all covered, and they should all be. But it’s kind of interesting that I’m not sure that trial and training would actually—some people would say, “Well, maybe we should look at that with the PAWS Act,” because you don’t have to use animals to train dogs; you can use scent. So it is somewhat ironic that we’ve got changes to the PAWS Act—it’s too bad they didn’t put the changes to the trial and training in this one. In this House, I try to make relevant arguments and try—but there are some that are just glaring.

There are some changes in this bill that are very supportable, but some are question marks.

In my last minute, I’d just like to give a shout-out where a shout-out should be. Mark Baxter from the OPPA reached out to me because there was something in this bill that needed to be changed—it didn’t affect the context, but something that was out of order and needed unanimous consent. We were glad to help. We’re not out to stop policing. We are supportive. We want to keep the community safe, including the first responders who actually do most of the protection when protection is needed.

But when you’re going to talk about taking oversight bodies away, I have—I know how hard it is to wake someone up or to warn someone when something went wrong. It always makes the hair on the back of my neck shudder a little bit when—“Oh, it’s just another oversight body. It’s just regulation. We’re just modernizing.” I always worry about that. Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Questions for the member?

Mr. Todd J. McCarthy: I thank the member opposite for his submissions, but I do want to quote from Jon Reid, the Toronto Police Association president, who said, “The Toronto Police Association welcomes the Ford government’s investment in community safety and policing. The public has lived with the consequences of an inadequate bail system for far too long, and the resources announced today mean our members will be able to” refocus “their efforts on proactively monitoring violent offenders who wreak havoc on our sense of safety. We have long advocated for this support, and we will continue to work with the provincial government on the changes that will keep our communities and our members safe.”

Given those comments, it’s not just about the number of police officers who could be hired and deployed; it’s how they can focus and refocus their attention on what helps keep communities safe and keep violent offenders behind bars. Given that endorsement, will the member support this bill?

Mr. John Vanthof: I’d like to thank the member for that question. I listened closely to the quote. I don’t know if the quote even directly was referring to this bill. But I think the police community needs a lot more support. Please correct me if I’m wrong, but not only is it very hard to recruit police officers, but there are very many police officers who are out with PTSD because they face incredible challenges. I don’t see anything, really, in this

bill that is going to solve that issue. Many members here would know the number—I'll have to look it up on my phone—but there are a lot of police officers out with PTSD, and there are a lot of vacancies. But it's not just bringing new ones in with this change that doesn't change anything; it's also helping to protect the ones you have that do the work that we need—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you for the answer. We'll move to the next question.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I just want to build on the comments made by the government member in his question to my colleague's submission. Can you think of examples, not necessarily in this legislation, where stakeholders, perhaps in the public sector, are called to comment on something and they may not say exactly in some cases what they want to say or what they actually think, but the boss is the Premier and they're being called on to speak or comment on legislation. Do you think sometimes they—I don't know. Actually, I think you know where I'm going, so why don't you give us an answer?

Mr. John Vanthof: I thank my colleague for the question, but he's going somewhere I don't want to go. Now, I can't comment on what—I used to be on the board of the Dairy Farmers of Ontario, and I'll give you an example: When the government came out with something, at no point, unless it's very egregious, is a stakeholder going to come out and kick the government. It doesn't make sense regardless of stripe, because behind the scenes, you want to work with the government. I know governments of all stripes—the first thing they're after is a quote so they can do what the member did. That's how it works. I fully appreciate that. You have to build up relationships with your stakeholders. I know when I talk to my local police, they were as worried about mental health support as they were about recruitment, or perhaps more.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: The member is asking what difference this bill will make in recruiting men and women to join police enforcement. I think if the member were to speak to my police chief, Chief Nish Duraiappah, he would tell him, as he had told our committee on justice policy, that in our community in Mississauga a big barrier to entry is actually the recognition of foreign credentials or foreign post-secondary diplomas such as college, university, etc. I didn't even think of that when I was reading about this legislation, that immigrant families just like mine, many of them come with qualifications from other countries, but it is a systemic barrier. The chief called it a systemic barrier to access into policing.

So I wonder whether the member thinks that lifting this particular requirement will make a change? As the member knows, that's not the only thing we're doing. We're also funding the \$15,000 tuition fee which is another systemic barrier to access. So those two actions, taken together, I truly think will help our men and women join the wonderful career of policing.

1600

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you very much for that thoughtful question. I do think that removing systemic barriers to people who are disadvantaged will make a difference.

In direct response, the tuition isn't in this bill, but the change in the oversight bodies is in this bill, and until that is clarified, as I said—I made no bones about it—I'm worried about changes in oversight bodies, having had personal experience with it.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The next question?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I want to just start by saying how enormously proud I am to serve in this caucus with you, and I want to thank you for sharing your story with us here today. I think we're all moved, and we can all learn from you. Thank you so much, John.

Applause.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: My question is with regard to parts of this legislation that include Kiera's Law or parts of Kiera's Law. We all share that this is an important, important piece of legislation. As we know, this has come from a tragedy where Kiera was murdered by her father and it's the result of intimate partner violence, but I am surprised that this is not a stand-alone piece of legislation.

In fact, women who are in the violence-against-women sector, like Pamela Cross, who's the lawyer and advocacy director at Luke's Place, would have liked to see this as a stand-alone piece of legislation, and Margaret Macpherson, with Building a Better Way, which represents VAWs across Ontario, would have liked to see this as a stand-alone piece of legislation.

I believe that the tragedy of Kiera deserved for it to be its own bill so that we could all weigh in on this, and I ask the member what you feel about this as well.

Mr. John Vanthof: I'd like to thank the member for the question, and I'd like to thank all the members for the acknowledgement of the—one thing about this place: It's adversarial, but often those of us sitting here are the only ones who know what it's really like to have to represent people. Like, there's a camaraderie to this place; although we hit each other, we understand each other.

But specifically to the question, yeah, it would be much simpler if a piece of legislation like Kiera's Law was stand-alone, if it was given the—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Respect.

Mr. John Vanthof: —thank you for that—respect, given its rightful due for the people who suffered incredibly and continue to suffer.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

Ms. Donna Skelly: Good afternoon, Madam Speaker. I'm going to echo the sentiments from the member from Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas. You truly are easy to work with. Even though we may share different ideologies, you're always very kind in your comments, and I believe you genuinely do have the backs of police officers right across the province and, of course, in your own riding.

I've gone on a number of ride-alongs with a lot of friends who are police officers, and they say the reason why it's so difficult to recruit young people into their profession is that not everyone has their backs and that they are constantly attacked, and I have to admit that even from members of your own caucus.

My question to you is, can you assure us, or do you believe there are members within your own caucus who do want to see defunding of police, who do not have their backs, or do you believe that the NDP is united in standing with police officers across Ontario?

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you very much for that question. I really appreciate it. It's a good question. I've said many times that we fully support police. We fully believe that they play a vital role in our society. Regardless, we are going to need protection, but police also have to be supported, as the rest of society, with mental health, as we see other things in society break down: the addiction crisis, the lowering of people's incomes, an increase in food banks.

When I talk to Marty Thibault, a police officer, his biggest issue? He said, "Look across the road. There's a homeless guy there and I'll end up dealing with him three times today because I can't find him any service." So we have to look at that, as well, because having two Marty Thibaults to help that guy isn't going to help as much as—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you.

Further debate? Further debate? Further debate?

Mr. Kerzner has moved third reading of Bill 102, An Act to amend various Acts relating to the justice system, fire protection and prevention and animal welfare. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

Interjection: On division.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Carried, on division.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

BETTER SCHOOLS AND STUDENT OUTCOMES ACT, 2023

LOI DE 2023 SUR L'AMÉLIORATION DES ÉCOLES ET DU RENDEMENT DES ÉLÈVES

Mr. Lecce moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 98, An Act to amend various Acts relating to education and child care / Projet de loi 98, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne l'éducation et la garde d'enfants.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I recognize the minister to lead off the debate.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I do appreciate this opportunity. I want to first off note that I'll be sharing my time with the brilliant parliamentary assistant, the member from Ajax; the member from Whitby; the member from Kitchener South–Hespeler; the member from Durham; the member

from Mississauga Centre; and the member from Chatham–Kent–Leamington—all a strong team of parliamentarians who are here in support of greater accountability of strengthening the voice of parents and for refocusing Ontario's education system on what fundamentally matters to the life and success of young people, and that is academic achievement. It is ensuring young people are set up with the skills necessary to succeed in a changing, disrupted global economy around us. Those societies and those governments that have the courage to challenge our school boards to do better are the ones that will provide the competitive advantage every student deserves in this province.

Just two days ago, I joined the member from Oakville North–Burlington to meet this young girl, Bhavi, as she goes by. She's a young student—her parents are immigrants to Canada from India—and just came here some years ago with her grandparents and her parents. They saw the first generation in this country be the recipient of the Canadian Space Agency's Space Brain Hack challenge, which is a very competitive process. For this young girl to now see herself with the confidence that she could be an astronaut and is literally on the path to be in the Canadian Space Agency or NASA or even in other international settings—it helped me underscore our "why": Why we're here, why we ran in the first place, why we pursue reform and change and progress. Because it is for her and for the young people who are with us today physically in this House.

It is for them, for your children and grandchildren, that we are absolutely determined to play the challenge function we need to in government. As difficult as it may be and inexpedient as it may be, it is necessary for governments to have political courage to look to their agencies, their boards, commissions, school boards, colleges of teachers, faculties of education—everyone—to expect better. And I believe fundamentally that Bill 98, the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act, is a positive reflection on what is possible if we lift our ambitions, lift our expectations and elevate our confidence in what these young people can achieve if we give them the tools to succeed.

I want to provide a moment of gratitude to members of all the House across party lines for feedback. I'd be remiss to not recognize, Madam Speaker, your own interventions at committee, which were accepted in the positive feedback you provided me in helping to construct a bill that is good public policy, good ideas that make a difference in the lives of our kids. So I appreciate your leadership and I, frankly, appreciate everyone else who provided input to us privately or publicly in the committee and through the parliamentary assistant. These ideas matter and I believe they are now reflected in the third reading and this final iteration of the bill before the House, and it is a reminder of what is possible when we work together in the pursuit of better for the next generation.

1610

I am proud of this bill because I think what it sets out is a cultural change in a system that has historically been

static. Madam Speaker, you will know that the last time the Education Act was overhauled in any way was literally in its inception 25-plus years ago. A lot has changed. So much has changed—perhaps everything has changed—in our society and yet the system, the ecosystem around children, remains static. Our curriculum remains static. So much of this system was designed at a different time that isn't reflective of where the puck is going in this changing world. So this bill is designed as part of a spirit of elevating expectations, and while we've seen success, perhaps one of the greatest metrics of success—because we often speak about, how do we measure success? Government expends billions; how do we get a better return on the investment? We yield a better outcome for our kids.

Under our government, when you look at the five-year outlook of graduation, I'm very proud. When we started in 2018, the graduation rate in this province was in and around 85%—still among one of the highest in the OECD—but I'm proud to confirm today that, because of our investments, because of our commitment to modernizing curriculum, because of our determination to lift up the most at-risk kids and still maintain high academic standards for everyone else—I'm proud that our graduation rate today is at 89%, up from 85%. That is not insignificant.

Interjections.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: And that's not them applauding government. We applaud the students, the staff, the parents for having the determination to believe in their kids, and we believe in these kids. We need to challenge policy-makers or politicians who often want to maintain status quo. Look, I understand in politics—in my relatively young time in this business, I get it—it is easier to go along to get along, but it takes courage to stand up to vested interests, to say, “Look, I expect better for the next generation.” I believe the people of Ontario gave our government—frankly, gave us all—a mandate to play that challenge function. We do not apologize for expecting better for children; in fact, I would urge every member opposite to accept that premise.

Now, Madam Speaker, we know we've seen success. We celebrate that success. That trajectory is moving in the right direction. But look, we also are self-aware of the challenges: societal problems, mental health, violence, food insecurity—I mean, there are so many challenges that are arising today, and it worries us all. We are also concerned about some of the great darkness young people face. We live in a society where there still are segments, dark segments of civil society, that deny young people their existence. I say this during a period of Pride. I'm self-aware that we still have to keep pushing, moving the yardstick forward on social progress, on issues of fundamental human rights.

But I believe in my heart that this country is a special place where, if you work hard, you come here committed to play by the rules, pay your taxes, do your part, be a good, active citizen, keep your head down and commit yourself to higher learning, whatever that path—college, university, skilled trades, whatever it is—you can succeed.

That is a message we need to instill in our young people, to have that fire in their belly to never give up, to believe in themselves; to believe that if they work hard, they can own a home, they can graduate and get a good education, they can pursue higher learning, they can get a job connected to their skills, they can earn a living that gives them some sense of dignity. It's not just monetizing skill sets, but it's making sure young people are set up for success, however one defines success.

I believe for our Premier as a parent, and for many of our caucus colleagues: parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts—I'm an uncle of two young girls in the Catholic system and a future nephew who will inevitably join our publicly funded schools. For us, we have a massive sense of optimism in what is possible if we get it right today, and that's why I'm imploring my colleagues opposite across party lines to meaningfully reflect on the spirit of the bill and the specific provisions of the bill. When you're adding more staff, Madam Speaker—7,500 more people; when you've added literally billions of net new dollars relative to where we started; when you've increased the investment but we still don't see a material change in the outcomes—and this isn't a comment on our government. It was, respectfully, a comment on the former Liberal government. They also spent a lot of money, to give credit, but if the virtue is just in expenditures, then we're really not looking at the result; we're not measuring the result that matters most.

EQAO data matters. A child's ability to be literate, to have mathematical competence, to graduate, those are metrics that matter and those are the ones that should prevail today. How do we move the yardstick forward in those areas? How do we challenge school boards to refocus their emphasis, their energy, on academic success? It is the single greatest driver of student outcomes if we have a young student in a school that is engaged in the curriculum, and I believe in my heart that this bill reflects the common sense of the people who sent us here. It reflects the necessity to urge school boards giving the government and the minister of the day the legal authority, the statutory power to now require school boards to refocus it on what matters most. It repatriates that authority back to the people of Ontario, who gave us a mandate.

There's not a minister of 72 school boards in Ontario. There is a minister responsible for 72 school boards, for two million children, for billions of dollars, for the outcomes associated. We need someone, whoever it is, whatever party is elected at that time in history, to have the authority to lead, to lead and to demand better.

I wanted to use this opportunity to define our why, to express to you and to the people watching why we care about this, why we are motivated to act, why we are absolutely determined to see the spirit of this bill achieved and to utilize our powers wisely, following meaningful consultation, but determined to get this done.

Madam Speaker, I want to give a special recognition before I turn it over to the parliamentary assistant. The parliamentary assistant, the member from Ajax, has spent

her life with a great sense of personal commitment to public education. Yes, as a former public school board trustee, as someone who worked with, as a private citizen, the government of the day—I knew the member from Ajax as Patrice, a mom, a trustee, an advocate for public education, who urged us to de-stream the curriculum, who urged us to remove regulation 274, to hire educators based on their merit and qualification, not based on their union seniority. I know Patrice as someone who demands better for her own children in the publicly funded school system.

It's irregular, Madam Speaker, to have an introduction, I'm very proud to introduce and to thank the member from Ajax, the parliamentary assistant, because if not for her leadership, we would not be here today; this bill would not be at third reading. I'm very grateful for her work, for her passion and for her personal commitment to the next generation of this province.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I recognize the member for Ajax.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Speaker. It is an honour to stand before you today as the parliamentary assistant to the Ontario education minister to once again speak in support of Bill 98, the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act.

I want to focus on my time as a former trustee—and this legislation proposes to make important changes that are long overdue. Prior to joining Ontario's government caucus, I was honoured to serve Ajax students and parents in the Durham District School Board for nearly a decade. During this time, I gained first-hand experience in Ontario's education system and witnessed some of the challenges that trustees, school boards and parents face. That is why I firmly support the proposed reforms in the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act to enhance governance and leadership.

Ontario's government understands how important trustees are. They uphold public education. They're important advocates for education in their communities. Their duties and responsibilities are outlined in the Education Act to ensure the board is able fulfill its duties and provide world-class education for the students who rely on it. It is not always easy, and sometimes there are real challenges.

Ontario trustees support our education system, making day-to-day decisions in school boards which help ensure schools have the resources they need to provide an environment which supports student achievement and well-being, as well as the needs of the community they serve. They are the voices of parents who elect them and they carry the interests of students who rely on them.

Ontario is large and diverse, and as a result, so is the job of a school board trustee. The role can vary across the province as boards work to meet local needs. However, as it stands right now, there is an inconsistency in boards across the province for trustees when it comes to skills development and training.

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Discussions with trustees, in addition to a public survey, demonstrated that there was strong support to establish provincial standards for trustee codes of conduct.

I'm happy to say that, if passed by this Legislature, these reforms will establish this, helping set trustees up for future success.

This proposed legislation would also establish the implementation of standardized, mandatory training for all trustees on a provincial level, to ensure they have the knowledge and skills necessary for this very important job. This will be an important tool for new trustees, to help them to be able to hit the ground running and support students and parents in the best way possible.

Let's face it: Ontario is huge. If we look at our neighbours to the south, our province is roughly the size of Texas, if they added Montana as well—not just Texas—or, for those with a more European flair, putting Spain and France together. Suffice it to say our 72 school boards cover a lot of ground.

That is precisely why we need to have consistency across the province. Pockets of excellence are not enough. To help establish that, Bill 98, the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act, would establish provincial requirements for trustee codes of conduct, which sets out very clear expectations on how trustees fulfill their duties. By clearly establishing this standard code of conduct, this legislation seeks to ensure all trustees clearly understand their roles and obligations to their constituents, while also helping resolve some unfortunate instances where trustees shut down the voice of parents who were simply offering views that might not be agreed with.

But one of the most important skills any trustee can have is the ability to work with all those elected with you to deliver for your constituents. It is in the spirit of this that I am so pleased we were able to accept two amendments from our friends across the aisle. Two opposition motions were adopted at committee and will help ensure this legislation meets another one of its goals: to build our schools faster. I want to thank my opposition colleagues for their co-operation and collaboration.

As we build better schools faster, we will also need to ensure they have the tools and direction they need to provide our students with the skills and knowledge they need to take their next steps in life.

Directors of education are leaders in our school communities who keep our schools on track, but right now there are few criteria or requirements for a candidate to assume this critical role. Their methods of assessment vary across the province. It is for this reason that I support establishing governmental authority to set out a consistent performance appraisal framework to support boards in assessing directors of education. This will provide consistency across Ontario, while ensuring boards are supported in meeting their duties and delivering on provincial priorities, like reading, writing and math.

This bill seeks to address differences and inconsistencies we're seeing in school board performance across the province. Consistency in trustee training, establishing provincial standards in trustee codes of conduct, a standardized performance appraisal framework for directors of education are important tools that need to be added. The results will be better outcomes for students and children across the province.

As a former trustee, I know this bill will help school boards and directors of education deliver the world-class education our children can depend on to be successful in life.

I hope all members of this House will join me in supporting Bill 98, the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act.

As I said, I will share my time with the member from Whitby.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I recognize the member for Whitby.

Mr. Lorne Coe: It's an honour for me to stand in this chamber once again and speak in support of Bill 98. As some of the members in the official opposition will know, I was the former education critic for my party, and I can tell you that the quality of public education in Ontario is of the utmost importance to me and, indeed, the parents in every corner of our province—in particular, the town of Whitby and other parts of the region of Durham.

Back in April, I had the pleasure of speaking in favour of Bill 98 during its second reading debate. Near the end of my second reading remarks, I told this chamber that good governance and strong board leadership are essential for positive student outcomes. Speaker, I stand by those words. Ontario's education system needs both good governance and strong board leadership, which is why it's critically important that we pass Bill 98.

In fact, Speaker, the Ontario Ombudsman recently provided a written submission on Bill 98, and he had this to say: "I commend Bill 98's goal of strengthening school board oversight for the benefit of Ontario's public education system. Robust codes of conduct and integrity commissioner processes play a vital role in ensuring public confidence in elected school board officials."

Speaker, at this juncture, I'd like to thank Minister Lecce and his parliamentary assistant for putting the interests of families and students first. Thank you so much. After a decade when the previous government closed over 600 schools, our government is listening to parents. Consequently, we're investing approximately \$15 billion over 10 years to build new schools, improve existing education facilities and create new child care spaces.

I also commend the minister for updating the curriculum so that it does a better job of meeting the needs of today's labour market. That means more math, more science, a good grounding in financial literacy and digital fluency, and of course, more of an emphasis on careers in the skilled trades. There's no question, Speaker—absolutely no question—that this government is delivering for hard-working families in Whitby and other parts of the region of Durham.

Now, some of my colleagues might be wondering, if the minister is doing such an incredible job of driving transformational change, why do we need Bill 98? Well, Speaker, the short answer is that there is only so much you can accomplish without enacting new legislation. If passed, the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act, 2023, would legislate reforms under four statutes: the Education Act, the Ontario College of Teachers Act, the

Early Childhood Educators Act and the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001. Bill 98 includes a number of critically important reforms, and we're debating them today because parents deserve greater transparency and accountability, and young people deserve better academic outcomes.

Speaker, our legislation is increasing accountability by giving parents new tools to navigate and understand the education system while establishing basic qualifications for directors of education. Our party believes in empowering parents, and I'm confident that the proposed handbook for parents, if this legislation is passed, will spell out their rights and obligations. Our government's legislation will enact over 25 key recommendations across five themed categories, including accountability and transparency, governance and leadership, maximizing capital assets, teacher training and oversight, and consistent information and approaches to student learning.

Speaker, at this juncture, I'd like to turn the speaking over to my colleague MPP Dixon, Kitchener South–Hespeler.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I recognize the member for Kitchener South–Hespeler.

Ms. Jess Dixon: I've stood here before and talked about why I ran for office with the background of being a crown attorney, but there's another part of that as well that I want to talk about that makes this bill feel very personal to me. I went to a private school—I joined a private school in grade 6—so I never realized that there was such a thing as streaming. Academic and applied didn't exist in my private school. It was a university prep school that was the—it was such an expectation that we never even talked about the fact that that was the expectation. I graduated from there and went on to university.

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I bought a house in 2015 that was a foreclosure. It's one of those little wartime houses, and it's in an area of town that has a large sort of swath of geared-to-income single-family housing, so a lot of my neighbours are people who are in geared-to-income housing.

When I started working on my house, I would see a neighbour of mine going by every day. She would slow down and look at my house, and I realized that she was living vicariously through my renovation. At the time, she had a baby and a 13-year-old. As I continued working on the house, I got to know her better and better. She was a single mom and had two daughters.

The first thing that struck me about education—her older daughter was helping me one day. She was bored and came over to help me do some gardening. I don't have kids; I don't consider myself super good with kids, but I was talking to her and asking her what was happening in school. She was just finishing grade 8. I was asking her, "What are you thinking? Are you looking forward to high school? Do you have any thoughts about what you'd love to do?" I realized that she didn't have the faintest idea that university or college or any type of future education, trade school applied to her. She thought that it was something that you had to be really rich or really smart to do, and for

her, the question of what happened afterwards was just a blank space. As I pushed further, I ended up unearthing the concept of applied versus academic, which, as I said, I didn't even realize existed. That's how insulated I was, coming from my private school environment. I found out that she had been put into the applied stream, and I couldn't figure out why. She's a smart girl, but more than that, she was hard-working. I thought, "Wait. I know that you need some of these courses in order to apply for universities, and they're cutting her off before she has even had the chance to start."

I dug in further and realized that her teacher had simply written down a recommendation that she go into applied. The nature of her family and her mom—her mom is a great mom, but she accepts the authority of the teacher. She thought that because the teacher said her daughter should be in applied, that was that and there was nothing more you could do, nothing more you would do; it had already happened, it had been done. I ended up marching into the school and was initially told that there was some pushback that had already been done. So I said, "All right. Well, we're pulling her out of this school and putting her into a different school, and she's going into academic." She completed all of that in academic, and she's just finishing her first year of being an occupational therapist at Georgian up in Barrie.

The next thing was during COVID, and now we were dealing with my neighbour's other daughter who was coming into grade 1, grade 2, at this point. Again, I don't have kids; it has been a long time since I was in grade school, and I didn't have the faintest idea what schoolwork looked like. Her mom came over to me—they didn't have a printer or anything like that—and asked me to print out some worksheets. I printed them out, I looked at them and I thought, "Oh, my Lord. How is this what we are using as a teaching aid? I know how smart this girl is; I know how smart your average child is. How are we devaluing the intelligence of Ontario children to this extent?"

Then I realized her daughter was on the tablet, and I realized she had never learned how to write yet. She was going into grade 2, but she didn't know how to write. She was struggling massively with reading; struggling, really, with everything. At the time I thought, "I'm going to be in their life anyway. If I don't do something now, I'm going to wish that I did it years ago."

So I looked into tutoring options, and I ended up putting her into Kumon. Kumon is a very old-school tutoring system that focuses on the idea that if you can read, if you can write, if you can do math, you can conquer the world. I genuinely believe that. So the little one has been in Kumon for several years now, and her confidence, her vocabulary, her ability to do math in her head have expanded rapidly.

But then, I think it was last year, she got a failing grade in math, and I was trying to figure out why. It was because she hadn't used this box thing to show her work, because for her that math problem was so easy she could do it in her head, and she essentially failed the test for it.

When I was looking at getting into politics, that was one of the things that started pushing me, that feeling of, "This

is an emergency." She's just one child, and she's not going to fall through the cracks, because she has a very nosy and overbearing neighbour across the street, but there are a lot of kids who didn't have that. I realized that so much of the system relied on parents being there to pull and advocate and fight, and not every parent is able to do that. Not every parent has the ability to do that, or even the awareness that it's an option that they do that.

So when I came here—I remember having conversations at doors when I was out door-knocking, and I would literally talk about my neighbour, because it was so powerful for me. It filled me with so much anger, frankly, that this was happening to her, and that it was therefore happening to countless other children.

When this bill was announced, when we started working on the de-streaming, when I started realizing that what we're trying to do is to create accountability, create data, create measurable results that we can look at, that we can say, "Are we succeeding? Are we failing? How do we put this to the test? What can we do better?", I had this incredible satisfaction of feeling like—I came here because I was so personally offended by the state of something, and to end up being part of a government that is actually doing something about it feels incredibly gratifying.

I will most certainly be supporting this bill, and as I do so and as I eventually stand up to vote, I'll be remembering that day under the lilac bushes when I first found out about applied versus academic and realized what an appalling concept it was to have this young girl just completely shut out of education. I will feel deeply satisfied to vote in favour of this bill.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next speaker?

Mr. Trevor Jones: Speaker, I'm a product of public education. My three children are products of public education. I'm a strong believer in public education. I'm a believer in representative democracy, serving the needs of hard-working families. For these reasons, it's an honour for me to rise in the House to express my strong support for Bill 98, the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act.

When I meet and speak with hard-working families in Chatham-Kent-Leamington, the subject of education always comes up. It comes up in my household daily, because my wife, as many of you know, is a high-performing, award-winning and caring high school science and business teacher recently promoted to vice-principal. We're vested in this public education system. Many families appreciate that our Minister of Education is working hard to update the curriculum to better reflect the needs of a modern labour market.

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My communities also tell me there's lots more to be done. They're frustrated by what they perceive as a big and impersonal bureaucracy in the form of their local school board that resists change and is neither accountable nor transparent, and they feel it doesn't care about their views.

If I may quote from the Royal Commission on Learning that was originally commissioned by our former Premier

Bob Rae way back in the 1990s, it says, “One complaint that we heard, repeatedly, was that the public education system no longer seems to be responsible to the public. This is one major cause of the lack of confidence that so many ... feel for the system. Although board of education trustees and provincial governments are elected, there exists widespread unease that schools have become a kingdom unto themselves, with little need to report to parents or to the world at large what they are doing with our kids, and whether they’re doing it successfully.”

The problems in the education system are deep-rooted and they go back decades, as the royal commission reported nearly 30 years ago. The current system simply isn’t meeting the needs of students to learn the basics of reading, writing and mathematics, and there are increasing numbers of students with special needs and mental health challenges in our schools.

Indeed, the Ontario Association of Parents in Catholic Education said as much in their written submission to Bill 98, which read, “The Right to Read inquiry demonstrated how important it is for boards to focus on the latest research to help” individual child learners “achieve their best, based on science-driven approaches to teaching instruction. There should be a stronger focus on getting back to the basics such as reading, writing, and math, as well as adapting to the new” technology in the world.

I agree wholeheartedly. Right now, teacher education programs don’t provide consistent training in the fundamentals of math or literacy. Information about overall performance of school boards is not easily accessible. Try and find it; I have, and you can’t access it readily. Parents and the public at large feel the same way. The ministry has limited ability to drive or enforce provincial priorities. We need to act. If Bill 98 is passed, it can improve the education system by:

- driving provincial priorities and expectations for Ontario’s education sector from the province through to the province’s classrooms to enhance accountability and transparency;

- enabling more effective governance through reforms for education sector boards of trustees, including a standard code of conduct, and directors of education;

- helping to maximize the considerable real estate assets of our boards;

- ensuring Ontario’s teachers are trained for the needs of today’s, and tomorrow’s, classrooms; and, most importantly, providing the information and tools necessary to ensure consistent information and approaches to student learning, including student learning about mental health and well-being, are met.

Bill 98 is incredibly comprehensive legislation that will strengthen and reform the education system for decades to come. I’ll add that Skills Ontario recently praised Bill 98 in its own written submission, stating, “The provision in Bill 98 that allows the minister to require school boards to make their reports available for the public in an appropriate manner is a commendable step toward promoting transparency and accountability”—for parents, for teachers, for communities, for all of us.

Passing Bill 98 would be a major step toward the government’s efforts to ensure Ontario’s education system is meeting the needs of students, families and taxpayers. It’s worth supporting, and I’ll be supporting it.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The member for Mississauga Centre.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I thank you for this opportunity to stand up and speak on behalf of Bill 98, the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act. I will be sharing my time with the member for Durham.

When I think of this bill, a few themes emerge: transparency, accountability and fiscal management; student outcomes; giving voice to parents; better school board governance; and putting surplus properties to better use.

The stakes are incredibly high, Speaker. Ontario is facing a shortage of skilled labour, and we simply must do a better job of preparing our kids for today’s, and tomorrow’s, economy. The Minister of Education and his parliamentary assistant have made great progress in updating the curriculum and preparing our kids for lifelong success.

I recently had the opportunity to visit many schools during the last constituency week: Saint-Trinité in Oakville, Jeunesse Sans Frontières in Brampton, l’École secondaire de la Rivière-des-Français in French River and Rick Hansen in my riding of Mississauga Centre. Speaker, I can tell you how energized I feel after meeting with our bright young people. They are smart. They possess incredible agency. They are fierce. They are courageous. They are resilient. And yes, they are our future. They have a government that has their back by investing in their success and by insisting on improved student outcomes.

Madam Speaker, our students are already benefiting from a stronger focus on STEM learning and math, including instruction in financial literacy and greater access to training and work in the skilled trades. I was thrilled to witness this at Rick Hansen school in my riding, where I attended the automotive and robotics workshop where students were—on their lunch hour, nonetheless—building a mini race car and were set to compete against other high schools at the University of Waterloo. What an incredible opportunity for these students to put their skills to the test and engage in some healthy competition.

Speaker, after a decade when the previous Liberal government closed over 600 schools across the province and refused to listen to the concerns of parents, our government is investing \$15 billion over 10 years to build new schools, improve existing facilities and create new child care spaces. Since 2019, our government has invested over \$2 billion in education capital projects, including 100 new schools, 88 school additions and over 6,400 new licensed child care spaces.

I can attest to this because one of these new schools is Elm Drive Public School in my riding, an investment of \$15.8 million, which was opened this past September. The Minister of Education and I had the fun opportunity of welcoming students and parents on their very first day back in school.

Furthermore, we are also investing in 34 capital projects at our French-language school boards to the tune of \$235 million. Our government is clear: Building schools in all corners of the province and for learning in both official languages is a priority for us.

Madame la Présidente, nous sommes fiers de nous associer à notre conseil scolaire pour construire et améliorer les écoles pour les familles des travailleurs, mais cette relation ne peut pas être entièrement unilatérale, la province se contentant de fournir de l'argent.

Les parents de Mississauga m'ont dit qu'ils soutenaient l'éducation publique et sa capacité à transformer des vies, mais ils croient aussi que les conseils scolaires doivent être beaucoup plus raisonnables et transparents quant aux fonds qu'ils dépensent et aux résultats qu'ils obtiennent. Les parents sont des gens raisonnables. Je crois qu'il est raisonnable de s'attendre à une plus grande responsabilité et à une plus grande transparence de la part des conseils scolaires.

In fact, Madam Speaker, Ontario's Ombudsman recently had this to say:

"I commend Bill 98's goal of strengthening school board oversight for the benefit of Ontario's public education system. Robust codes of conduct and integrity commissioner processes play a vital role in ensuring public confidence in elected school board officials."

Madam Speaker, why do we need to strengthen school board oversight? Well, earlier in the year, this House debated an opposition motion regarding our government's funding for school boards. I think members of the government did an excellent job of proving that education funding is going up, and not down, year over year. We don't need to revisit this debate, but I do believe that a few facts are worth repeating.

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Speaker, our government has increased education funding every year since we took office in 2018. That includes an increase of \$683.9 million, to \$26.6 billion, for the soon-to-be-completed 2022-23 school year, which is the single largest investment in public education in Ontario's history, representing a 9% increase from 2017-18, when the Liberals were last in power.

The Toronto District School Board, or TDSB, has enjoyed an increase of \$38 million since the 2017-18 school year even though its enrolment has fallen by 16,000 students. The same is true for the Toronto Catholic District School Board. The TCDSB has seen an increase in funding of over \$20.5 million since 2017 even though its enrolment decreased by close to 7,000 students during that period.

Overall, most school boards are doing a very good job of managing their resources and educating young people—for the simple reason that 89% of high school students graduate within five years; that's up from 85% when we first took office.

The Ministry of Education has been limited in its ability to enforce provincial priorities through to schools, and parents are frustrated because information about school board performance and the relationship between education

spending and its ability to support education outcomes is incredibly difficult to access for the public at large.

Across the province, about 700 elected trustees provide local governance over a \$27-billion education system—\$27 billion; that's a lot of money. Yet trustees lack a consistent set of skills, training, or a standard code of conduct.

We, as politicians, are accountable and transparent about our spending and our budgets, and I believe trustees should be held to the same standard.

Speaker, too many parents see their local school boards as big and impersonal bureaucracies, and they feel they have limited knowledge or ability to improve the education of their children. Clearly, parents, students and taxpayers deserve some better accountability from their school boards, and that's what the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act is all about.

School boards sit on the largest vertical real estate portfolio in the broader public sector, with over 4,600 open or operating schools. Our legislation, if passed, would strengthen the ministry's oversight over the use, sale and development of school board real estate, including the power to direct school boards to establish a framework for surplus properties, along with the ability to direct a sale or sever a property. This should not be a controversial measure.

Back in February 2012, the Commission on the Reform of Ontario's Public Services issued a 543-page report, popularly known as the Drummond report, that called for sweeping measures to increase efficiencies in government. If I may quote from the Drummond report, Speaker:

"Efficiency can also be found by maximizing the value of the school boards' capital assets...."

"The minister should have the power to order the sale of unused properties, especially when such dispositions could meet other needs...." I couldn't agree more.

We are building infrastructure across this province. We are building long-term-care homes. We are building hospitals. We're building community centres. If there is a property that has been unused for decades in a school board, well, we should be able to assess the need of that property and the belonging to the school board and put it up for sale, to put that property to better use.

Our legislation would also strengthen accountability over school board spending, including additional resources for financial investigations when needed, and require transparent reporting on school board spending and how it supports student outcomes. The act would enable the minister to require school boards to report publicly against standardized categories of spending twice annually. It would strengthen the minister's authority to direct and/or prohibit board participation in prescribed activities that could place the board at financial risk. It would also establish the minister's authority to prescribe financial policy and accountability matters for board-controlled entities.

Lastly, our legislation would set minimum and maximum limits on funding to school boards by GSN funding envelope, set time limits for use of school renewal

funds and initiate a comprehensive Grants for Student Needs review this summer to simplify and enhance transparency. I heard about this issue a lot in my riding and in Mississauga, where school boards were giving funding for certain matters, for certain envelopes, and they spent it on completely different issues. So this particular legislation would address that particular problem.

Speaker, there's no question that Ontario has needed school board reforms such as these for a very, very long time. A minute ago, I read from a report that was commissioned by former Premier Dalton McGuinty. I would also like to read from another report issued by the 1994 Royal Commission on Learning that was chaired by Monique Bégin and Gerald Caplan and commissioned by former Premier Bob Rae. To quote from the royal commission report, "We recommend the transfer of several key responsibilities ... from boards ... as a result, the primary responsibility of school boards will be to translate general ministry guidelines into viable local practice."

Speaker, hard-working families in Mississauga Centre demand and deserve greater accountability from the education system. Parents deserve a voice in the education of their children. Our government is listening to their concerns, and we are delivering. The Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act will prove to be a major step forward in ensuring the education system is preparing Ontario's young and bright minds for the jobs of tomorrow.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The member for Durham.

Mr. Todd J. McCarthy: It is an honour to join the debate this afternoon in this House on behalf of the residents of my riding of Durham to express my support, because I do plan to join the others in the government caucus to support the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act.

Speaker, student achievement is at the centre of everything we do on the education file. I believe this legislation is a necessary step toward helping more young people prepare for the challenges of tomorrow.

Whenever I talk to the hard-working families in my riding of Durham, the subject of education frequently comes up. They are impressed with the education ministry's updates to the math curriculum in 2020 and 2021 and the science curriculum in 2022. They applaud the Minister of Education and they applaud the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Education for their leadership and their initiative with respect to this bill.

It is evidence that there was a shameful legacy from the Liberal government of the past from 2000 to 2018. While the global economy changed around us, the former Liberal government stood idly by and left students with an outdated curriculum. But with this bill, if it is passed, we can change that shameful legacy.

A student's education can provide a solid foundation for future success. That is why our government has made record investments in student learning, providing tutoring supports to help students catch up following the pandemic and to continue to strengthen and modernize the curriculum.

Our government is making a historic investment in Ontario schools by providing a projected \$27.6 billion in public education for the 2023-24 school year. Along with funding for school board operations, targeted initiatives will support student achievement and well-being.

In addition, our Minister of Education recently announced that we are investing more than \$180 million for 2023-24 in math and reading supports for Ontario students in our classrooms and at home. This builds upon our previous \$200-million investment which supported students with our four-year math strategy.

Just a few years ago, 85% of secondary students graduated within five years. That rate has risen to 89% today, thanks in large part to the curriculum reforms and the updates our government has enacted. Clearly, those numbers are moving in the right direction, and, as I said, much of that improvement can be traced to our government's focus on lifting everyone up—destreaming, new mental health supports, and going back to the basics of reading, writing and math.

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Families also tell me there's a lot more that needs to be done, and they're frustrated by what they perceive as a big and impersonal bureaucracy in the form of their local school board that resists change, is neither accountable nor transparent, and doesn't seem to care about their views. If my friends in the opposition benches have trouble believing that, I will also gladly quote from the royal commission reporting to former NDP Premier Bob Rae. That commission on learning from the mid-1990s concluded:

"One complaint that we heard, repeatedly, was that the public education system no longer seems to be responsible to the public.

"This is one major cause of the lack of confidence that so many seem to feel for the system. Although board of education trustees and provincial governments are elected, there exists widespread unease that schools have become a kingdom unto themselves, with little need to report to parents or to the world at large what they're doing with our kids, and whether they're doing it successfully."

That's a quote from almost 30 years ago to an NDP government in a report.

Let me quote others, more recently, with respect to what our government has been doing and plans to do if this bill is supported by this House.

Gary Rabbior, president of the Canadian Foundation for Economic Education, noting the rapidly changing labour market and the changing nature of jobs and work, stated recently: "It is vitally important to equip our students with the fundamentals and underlying abilities that can be applied across a range of career paths. Rapid developments in AI and related technologies will likely require our youth to adapt and pivot in their careers more so than any prior generation. Having a solid foundation of important core skills such as math, numeracy, science, technology and overall problem-solving will help them greatly to respond to these future changes. We commend the province of Ontario for launching this initiative that will

help to ensure Ontario students can build successful careers—and, along with that, successful futures.”

Alicia Smith, executive director of Dyslexia Canada, had this to say recently: “Dyslexia Canada sees today’s funding announcement as a positive and necessary step that will help Ontario school boards shift their approach to early literacy to align with evidence-based practices.”

Catherine Toovey, executive director, Community Literacy of Ontario, stated recently: “Community Literacy of Ontario is the voice of over 100 community-based adult literacy programs across Ontario and we agree that literacy is an essential skill that will affect all areas of a person’s life: at school, at work, personal health, and more. The changes that the Ministry of Education is making to the current public school curriculum directly addresses literacy and aims to support children building this crucial life skill. We also agree that confidence is a key indicator of success for learners of all ages. Building young learners’ confidence will have a direct impact on their ability to continue learning, for life, just as our programs support countless adult learners achieve more than they ever thought possible.”

Patrick Daly, president of the Ontario Catholic School Trustees’ Association, stated recently: “Today’s announcement of significant additional resources in support of improved student math, writing and literacy skills are welcomed and very much appreciated.”

So we have to consider not only what others are saying, who are experts and leaders in the educational field outside of this government, what has been said in this House by the Minister of Education and my colleagues today, but what is being said to us by families and students and teachers, people who are living the education system and can benefit from these reforms.

The Minister of Education has done a phenomenal job of driving transformational change, Speaker, but the problems in the education system are deep-seated and they do go back decades, as the royal commission reported nearly 30 years ago. The current system simply hasn’t been meeting the needs of learning the basics of reading and math, and there are increasing numbers of students with special needs and mental health challenges. Teacher education programs do not provide consistent training in the fundamentals needed, such as math and literacy. Information about the overall performance of school boards is also not easily accessible by parents or the public at large, and the ministry has a limited ability to drive or enforce provincial priorities. And yet, all the while, the \$27-billion education system is overseen by 700 trustees who lack a consistent set of skills, training, and a standard code of conduct. This bill, if passed, will change that, because our government is taking action to address these long-standing problems.

The Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act will, if passed, include legislative and regulatory reforms under four statutes to support improved outcomes through several actions. This has been outlined by the Minister of Education, who rightly noted that this is a sweeping reform bill—long overdue—that is in the best interests of

students and their futures, preparing them for the jobs of tomorrow. I submit that the vast majority of teachers, and certainly all of the parents, will embrace these reforms, because it is in the best interests of our children, it is in the best interests of all students, and it is in the best interests of the future of Ontario because our students are our future. Thank you, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. That’s time for debate. We’re going to move to questions.

M^{me} Sandy Shaw: Ma question cet après-midi est pour le ministre de l’Éducation.

Les enfants francophones ont un droit constitutionnel à une éducation de haute qualité dans leur propre langue. Les partenaires en éducation de langue française ont tous averti le comité que ce projet de loi ne respecte pas le droit constitutionnel des Franco-Ontariens de gérer leur propre système d’éducation. Mais ce gouvernement a voté contre tous les amendements du NPD qui auraient assuré le respect pour la section 23 de la Charte. Le gouvernement n’adresse pas la pénurie d’enseignants non plus.

Pourquoi est-ce que ce gouvernement ne respecte pas les droits des Franco-Ontariens?

M^{me} Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Merci beaucoup pour cette question. Pendant les travaux du comité, on a entendu de différentes interventions des conseils scolaires francophones. Aussi, dans mon travail comme adjointe parlementaire de la ministre des Affaires francophones, j’ai parlé aux parents. J’ai parlé à l’organisme qui s’appelle Parents partenaires en éducation, et ce qui est clair est que les parents veulent une voix claire dans l’éducation de leurs enfants. Les conseils scolaires veulent aussi qu’on bouge plus d’éducateurs et d’éducatrices dans notre système de scolarité. C’est pourquoi avec ce projet de loi on va aussi embaucher 2 000 enseignants et enseignantes supplémentaires dans notre système de scolarité, en français et en anglais.

Alors, ce projet de loi est nécessaire pour atteindre notre but en éducation. On a le support des parents et on a le support des éducateurs et éducatrices, et on va continuer notre travail.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

Mr. Rob Flack: As everybody knows, Ontario is rapidly growing—I’ll ask my question to the member of Durham—and we’re going to need a lot more houses and we’re going to need a lot more schools. In particular in my riding of Elgin–Middlesex–London, with Volkswagen coming, we’re going to need a lot more schools in rural areas.

How does our government propose to address the need for schools across the province, particularly in rural areas, and how does our government propose to build modern schools faster? Because people are coming. This plant is being built. We’re going to have a lot more kids. We need the education system to provide this funding now.

1710

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): To answer, the member for Durham.

Mr. Todd J. McCarthy: Thank you to the member for the question. Of course, all the way along and parallel to this bill is our plan to build Ontario, investing in building Ontario, more homes, of course, to accommodate so many newcomers and the schools to go with it.

Just the other week, earlier this spring, during non-session days, I was joined by the Minister of Education for breaking ground at a school in north Oshawa. That's just one example. We're also building a high school to take the pressure off Maxwell Heights in north Oshawa. We're targeting all areas of my riding, which includes both rural and suburban areas. That approach to building schools that are right for the communities in which they're being built is being applied across the province in every riding. I'm very proud of that.

The Minister of Education is showing great leadership and comes to each and every groundbreaking and each and every announcement. That growth is possible because of our strong economic growth due to our government's policies.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: The bill fails to put forward a single measure that will improve accessibility for students with disabilities. The AODA Alliance and many other disability stakeholders asked for amendments to address this. The opposition put forward 15 amendments that could actually make a difference, but the government turned down all 15. What I would like to know is, can you tell me why the government is not interested in actually listening to people with disabilities and making full accessibility a basic requirement?

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): To answer, the member for Durham.

Mr. Todd J. McCarthy: I don't know who the member opposite is listening to, but I hear nothing but applause for our general policy on accessibility and respecting the different abilities of so many of our citizens, whether they be students of a younger age, teenagers, young adults or older adults. I'm proud of that record.

I encourage the member to go into the schools in her riding. I hope she sees what I'm seeing, which is diversity, which is accessibility, which is every student is welcome. No one is left behind. That is the policy behind this bill. That is the policy of this government generally within the education file and beyond.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

Ms. Laura Smith: Madam Speaker, nearly all the parents that I encounter tell me that they believe in the idea of a public school education but their school or their school board needs to be far more accountable to families and taxpayers. To be quite honest, as a parent, I completely agree with them.

Ontario is home to a variety of school experiences. There are four unique publicly funded school systems, 72 district school boards, over 3,900 elementary and 870 secondary schools. In the GTA, there are schools with over 2,000 students. In northern Ontario, we've got under 200.

All of these schools use the same curriculum with a learning experience that is vastly different.

The proposed legislation includes one set of policies for all boards. How will this be beneficial for the boards? I'm asking this question to the member from Chatham-Kent-Leamington.

Mr. Trevor Jones: The spirit of this bill and everything we do that's baked into this bill and the work we're doing to promote education and accountability is a pillar of respect and value to the unique and diverse nature of our communities. Thank you to my colleague for that question. At the end of the day, all school boards have one common responsibility: promote student achievement. Regardless of which one of the four boards you're from, it's to promote student accountability and achievement and have that accountability baked into the formula. Our goal with this proposed legislation is to reinforce this responsibility from the ground up.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

Mr. Kevin Holland: Speaker, parents in this province deserve an education system that is transparent and accountable, particularly with respect to the use of their funding. Our government has consistently provided record-setting investments to our school boards. However, there needs to be a more transparent process for parents to track the correlation between this record funding with respect to how it will help students learn the life and job skills they need in the future.

My question to the member from Whitby is, how will this bill address the lack of transparency when it comes to the relationship between funding and student achievement outcomes?

Mr. Lorne Coe: I'm pleased to be able to participate in the questions and answers.

What's clear in our bill is that the government is taking decisive action to improve accountability and transparency for students, parents and Ontario taxpayers. To the point that my member from Durham made earlier, all 72 school boards must be focused on their obligation to improve student achievement by preparing students with the life, jobs and critical thinking skills. That's why our government will allow for the province to set mandatory priorities regarding student achievement. That's what parents want, and that's what they've asked for.

Our government will continue to put students and parents back at the forefront of Ontario's education system.

I thank the member for his question on accountability and transparency.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We don't have time for another question. We'll move to further debate. I recognize the member for Ottawa West-Nepean.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I'm very happy to have the opportunity to rise today and speak to Bill 98, the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act.

Friday was the one-year anniversary of my election to this Legislature. Once again, I'd like to take a moment to thank the voters of Ottawa West-Nepean for giving me the opportunity to serve them here and be their voice here.

In my year here in this Legislature, I feel like every time the government brings forward legislation, I need to start by talking about process. Process might seem like it's kind of an inside baseball thing, but it's actually an incredibly important pillar of our democratic system.

In the last few weeks, I had the opportunity to visit a number of schools in Ottawa West–Nepean to talk about my work as an MPP. I always ask the kids to come up with an idea of a bill that I could use as an example to talk about the work that we do here, and they usually offer up a funny suggestion. I've got to talk about banning running in grocery stores and talking in bathrooms. My favourite has been mandatory ice cream for all kids on Saturdays. As I talk the kids through the process, I talk about how there are different perspectives on whether these ideas are actually a good idea or not. Free ice cream on Saturdays—kids might think this is an amazing idea because they work really hard all week and they don't get enough respect for how hard things are and how much we, the older generations, have screwed up the world that we're handing down to them. So the least that we can do is give them free ice cream every Saturday. But grown-ups might feel that we also work really hard and that we are also not getting the respect that we deserve for our work, and so where's our free ice cream on Saturdays? Doctors and nurses and public health officials might come and say, "It sounds like a really good idea to have free ice cream on Saturdays, but it's actually going to contribute to a rise in diabetes, and then we're going to have to pay more costs for our health care system, and that's going to be incredibly expensive for us to deal with." Ice cream shops might say, "Well, we don't get milk and sugar for free, and other ingredients, and we don't get free labour to scoop the ice cream, so if we have to provide free ice cream one day a week, we're just going to go out of business. Then there's no ice cream for anyone at all in the end."

It's an enjoyably silly conversation with the students, but it helps the kids to understand that there are different perspectives on why something can be a good idea or not a good idea and why it's really important to talk to people with different perspectives before adopting a bill and making it law for everyone. I tell the kids that it's our job, as MPPs, to listen to those different perspectives in debate, at second reading, at third reading and in committee, to try to come up with a bill that's fair to all perspectives and that takes into account what different people are experiencing in the province, so that we end up with laws that will help as many people as possible but don't hurt people.

But what we see time and time again from this government is that they don't want to listen to other perspectives. They don't consult properly before tabling legislation, and then stakeholders come in good faith to committee and share their perspectives and request amendments, and the government refuses to listen to them and actually address the problems with their bills.

1720

That's what we have here with Bill 98 once again. The government didn't consult before the bill was tabled. They told organizations, school trustees, teachers, education

workers, disability organizations and parents that the committee hearings were their consultation and their opportunity to be heard. And so these people, these organizations took the time to appear before the committee, took the time to write the committee and to ask for amendments that would respect the constitutional rights of Franco-Ontarians and of students with disabilities. They talked about the shortcomings of this bill with regard to local democracy and consultation and the ways in which the bill ignores work that is already being done by school boards. We also heard from many stakeholders about the lack of resources that are hamstringing boards from actually providing much-needed supports to students.

As a result of all of this testimony that we all heard, the NDP moved 60 amendments to the bill—60 amendments that were all requested by the witnesses. And the government voted against every single one of them, Speaker—every single one. That is not how you listen to people. It's not how you respect different perspectives. It is not how you respect the rights of Ontarians. It's not how you respect the expertise developed by people who are actually doing the important work of serving as school board trustees, teachers, education workers or people who have lived experience of being an Ontarian with a disability. That is how you end up with a bill that ignores fundamental rights, a bill that tramples on local democracy, a bill that allows the minister to run roughshod over people with actual experience in pedagogy and what is happening on the ground in our classrooms, a bill that sets up school boards to fail by allowing the minister to impose requirements with no additional funding.

Besides the fundamental disrespect that this refusal to listen shows to the people of Ontario, it also means that, once again, we have a bill that may be subject to a legal challenge. We all know this government's record with legal challenges. But at the end of the day, it's the Ontario taxpayers who pay for this government forging ahead with legislation that doesn't respect constitutional rights and the endless appeals when the government refuses to accept the court's decision.

We tried to move amendments that would ensure this bill respected constitutional rights, Speaker, but this government voted against all of them. Like we've seen before with Bill 28, Bill 124 and Bill 307, this government is not shy about trampling on constitutional rights even when they repeatedly get overturned by the courts or have to back down in the face of organized and angry Ontarians.

What we have here, once again, is a bill that doesn't respect constitutional rights—in this case, the right of Franco-Ontarians to manage their own education system and to be able to provide an education that is equivalent in quality to the education provided by anglophone boards.

Les Franco-Ontariens ont un droit constitutionnel à une éducation de qualité dans leur propre langue, gérée par et pour des francophones, mais ce que nous voyons avec ce projet de loi, c'est une loi qui ne respecte pas ce droit fondamental.

I want to talk a bit about the history of francophone education in Ontario and why it's so important that we

approach all legislation and policies from the perspective of what impact it will have on the constitutional right to a French-language education in Ontario that is equivalent to English-language education in quality.

It's important for us to remember, Speaker, that while the right to French-language education is a constitutionally protected right in Canada, much of the history of French education in Ontario is actually a history of attempted assimilation. In 1912, the Conservative government of the day actually made it illegal for schools to teach in French after the first two years of elementary school. Francophone students were only allowed one hour a day of instruction in French, and the government enforced this limit by taking away school funding or teacher certification if teachers taught in French. This rule remained in place for decades, although the government stopped enforcing it after 1927.

The rule had a lasting impact on the Franco-Ontarian population. For some families, it represented the loss entirely of their ties to the French language and francophone culture. It significantly reduced the francophone presence in some parts of our province. But even after the government stopped enforcing the limit on French-language instruction, official policy was still assimilationist in effect, because of the lack of public funding for French-language secondary schools. Most Franco-Ontarian students had to choose between a private French secondary school and an English public secondary school. But the privately funded schools had difficulty competing with the publicly funded schools, and francophone parents had to pay both taxes for the public schools and fees for the private schools, which had the effect of forcing students into the English system or forcing students to drop out after elementary school. Not surprisingly, the drop-out rate was very high for francophone students.

It was not until the 1960s that publicly funded secondary schools were allowed to teach subjects in French. But these were still French classes in English-language schools or French schools subject to control by English-dominated school boards, and as my colleague from Nickel Belt has pointed out several times, when francophone students are forced to attend school alongside anglophone students, it always ends with the francophone students learning English, but somehow never ends with the anglophone students learning French. So this policy led to protests and crises in the 1970s with Franco-Ontarians protesting that they needed and deserved access to francophone-only schools. There was pushback from school boards about providing these schools and the Conservative government of the day, the Bill Davis government, sided with the school boards, so francophones had to turn to the courts to get French-only schools.

Even after the Charter of Rights and Freedoms was adopted in 1982, francophones still needed to fight in the courts to have the right to a French-language education respected. In 1986, the Ontario High Court ruled that Franco-Ontarians have a right under section 23 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to have their children receive a publicly funded education in French-language

facilities that is equivalent to the instruction and facilities that anglophone schools provide. It was in 1990 that a Supreme Court of Canada case found that minority-language parents had the right to have a say over the management of schools in their language, and that public funding needed to support the management and control of minority-language parents of their schools. And it was only in 1998 that French school boards were created across the province, giving Franco-Ontarians control over their own schools in every part of the province, although we still see challenges, even today, in the area of equitable education, and many instances of francophones having to fight to access the resources and facilities they need to provide an equivalent education to what English-language students receive.

I share this history today, Speaker, because it's important for us to understand that this is not distant history; it is recent history. These battles were being fought while I was in school, while many of us here were in school.

I don't want to undersell the strength of the Franco-Ontarian community throughout this fight. They were organized and they fought hard through the creation of organizations and institutions like the Association canadienne-française d'éducation d'Ontario, which is one of the forerunners of the Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario, and the newspaper *Le Droit*, and through community activism like the Battle of the Hatpins and school strikes and sit-ins. But it is a fight that they had to wage for over a century, Speaker, again and again and again, to defend the right of francophones in Ontario to a quality French-language education managed by and for francophones. And it is a battle that they still cannot declare over, Speaker.

Currently one of the biggest challenges faced by the French-language education system in Ontario is the shortage of qualified French teachers, which means that an increasing number of teachers every year in the French system are not qualified to be teaching. This is entirely a problem created within the past decade by an Ontario government that ignored the reality of the French-language education system and imposed on them changes that were intended to address a problem that existed in the English language system, but not in the French language system.

The English system had a glut of teachers—more qualified teachers than positions available—so the former Liberal government changed teachers college from a one-year program to a two-year program and changed the funding formula to reduce the number of positions in faculties of education. As a result, the number of francophone teachers graduating in Ontario plummeted. From 2012-13 to 2014-15, the average number of graduates from French-language faculties of education was 939. In 2016-17 to 2018-19, there was an average of just 478 new graduates annually—half the number previous.

1730

This big drop would be bad enough if the number of francophone students was just stable. But, as it happens,

this is the fastest-growing student population in Ontario. So we need more French-language teachers every year, but we're only graduating half as many because of a policy change that had nothing to do with the French system but everything to do with the English system.

And then having created this problem, the government is failing to address it. The ministry participated in the working group, which came up with 37 recommendations, including funding of \$91.6 million over five years. The government announced a strategy two years ago with funding of only \$13 million, and since then, crickets.

No progress has been made. We need an additional 500 French-language teachers every year, but in the first two years of its strategy, the government has produced an additional 40 French-language teachers through its online portal. We can all do the math. It means that in the last two years when we needed to find or graduate an additional 1,000 French-language teachers, the government fell 960 teachers short of the target, which means that the problem is getting worse, not better, continuing to threaten the quality of French-language education in Ontario.

In fact, recently the union representing French-language teachers and education workers and the associations representing the French public school board trustees and the French Catholic school board trustees sent a letter to the minister, imploring him to act. I'm going to read that letter into the record:

« Monsieur le Ministre,

« Nous désirons par la présente solliciter votre intervention immédiate dans le dossier de la pénurie de personnel enseignant francophone qualifié. Nous avons déjà fait appel à vous à plusieurs reprises dans l'espoir d'inciter votre gouvernement à entreprendre des actions nécessaires, voire vitales, afin de maintenir la qualité du système d'éducation en langue française. Permettez-nous de vous signifier aujourd'hui que si rien n'est fait, et rapidement, pour remédier au manque de main-d'œuvre qualifiée, la situation risque de s'aggraver à un point tel que le système d'éducation en langue française en Ontario pourrait ne plus être en mesure d'offrir une éducation équivalente à celle qui est offerte aux élèves de la majorité.

« Nous aimerions vous rappeler que vous avez déjà en main des solutions concrètes et qui font consensus dans les 37 recommandations du rapport du Groupe de travail sur la pénurie de personnel enseignant dans le système d'éducation en langue française de l'Ontario qui vous ont été soumises il y a deux ans déjà. La lenteur de l'action gouvernementale dans la mise en œuvre de ces recommandations pourrait se solder par une détérioration de la qualité de l'éducation en langue française dans notre province. Parmi les nombreux exemples illustrant clairement ce que nous avançons, nous avons choisi les trois suivants :

« —En 2022, pour l'ensemble de la province, le nombre d'étudiantes et étudiants ayant obtenu un baccalauréat en éducation les autorisant à enseigner aux élèves des cycles intermédiaire et supérieur des écoles de langue française s'est élevé à 33.

« —Plus de 50 % des permissions intérimaires en Ontario sont accordées à des conseils scolaires

francophones pour l'embauche d'enseignantes et d'enseignants non qualifiés alors que le personnel du système d'éducation en langue française représente environ 5 % des effectifs.

« —Selon les dernières données de l'Ordre des enseignantes et des enseignants, 30 % des diplômées et des diplômés des programmes de formation en langue française ne renouvellent pas leur certificat de qualification après cinq ans.

« Notre profonde et croissante inquiétude vient du fait que, malgré la stratégie gouvernementale de recrutement et de rétention du personnel enseignant de langue française, dont les progrès demeurent trop modestes, les recommandations prioritaires du groupe de travail n'ont toujours pas été mises en œuvre. Nous vous implorons d'agir maintenant afin d'arrimer les programmes de formation à l'enseignement aux besoins du marché du travail; de favoriser l'insertion professionnelle et la rétention du nouveau personnel enseignant; de valoriser publiquement la profession enseignante ainsi que de promouvoir les opportunités d'emploi en éducation en langue française.

« Dans ce dossier, les données mentionnées plus haut sont alarmantes autant que l'est le manque d'actions concrètes et efficaces, car cela indique une tendance qui met en péril l'avenir même de notre système d'éducation et, conséquemment, l'avenir de la francophonie en Ontario. Certes, le nouveau plan d'action du Canada pour les langues officielles 2023-2028 et l'injection d'un milliard de dollars de plus pour les minorités francophones dans le budget 2023 du gouvernement fédéral arrivent à point, mais il ne faudrait pas croire qu'il s'agit là d'une panacée. La vitalité et la survie de nos communautés francophones dépendent largement de l'éducation dispensée à nos jeunes Franco-Ontariens et Franco-Ontariennes. Il va sans dire que les conséquences de la pénurie de main-d'œuvre qualifiée francophone risquent d'être déplorables non seulement pour nos écoles, qui sont aussi des centres névralgiques pour la construction identitaire francophone de nos communautés, mais aussi pour l'ensemble de la société ontarienne.

« Jusqu'à présent, nous avons été déçues du peu d'attention que le gouvernement semble porter à la pénurie, une situation frôlant la catastrophe pour le système scolaire de langue française. D'ailleurs, dans ce contexte, l'annonce de l'embauche de milliers d'enseignantes et d'enseignants spécialisés en mathématiques et en littérature, prévue par le projet de loi 98, nous a laissées perplexes. Nous voulons comprendre d'où vont provenir toutes ces embauches. Il en va de même pour les 45 millions de dollars non dépensés du montant total alloué à l'éducation au budget de l'Ontario 2022-2023, qui, d'après nous, pourraient certainement être considérés comme une source de financement pour contrer la pénurie de personnel enseignant francophone qualifié.

« Comme vous le savez, l'offre d'une éducation de qualité en français relève des obligations constitutionnelles du gouvernement envers l'éducation dans la langue de la minorité. Vous avez les solutions,

vous avez le budget et vous avez, au sein du comité de mise en oeuvre, la collaboration de tous les partenaires nécessaires à l'implémentation des recommandations du groupe de travail. Il ne manque que la volonté politique pour assurer le plus rapidement possible des résultats qui soient concrets, structurants et permanents. »

Cette lettre est signée par la présidente de l'Association des enseignantes et enseignants franco-ontariens, Anne Vinet-Roy; la présidente de l'Association des conseils scolaires des écoles publiques de l'Ontario, Anne-Marie Gélinault; et la présidente de l'Association franco-ontarienne des conseils scolaires catholiques, Johanne Lacombe.

Just to make sure that all members here understand the import of what they are saying to the government, I'm going to translate that last paragraph into English, Speaker: "As you know, providing quality French-language education is part of the government's constitutional obligation to education in the language of the minority. You have the solutions, you have the budget and you have, within the implementation committee, the collaboration of all the partners necessary to implement the working group's recommendations. All that's missing is the political will to ensure, as quickly as possible, results that are concrete, structural and permanent."

You can hear the urgency in the letter, Speaker. The quality of French-language education in Ontario is being threatened. We have the solutions available, we have the funding available, we have all the partners at the table, and yet the government is still not acting. Just to remind everyone, this is on a problem that the Ontario government created within the past decade by refusing to recognize the distinctiveness of the French-language education system.

With the long history of assimilationist policy by the Ontario government that has tried to undermine the French language repeatedly in Ontario by refusing to recognize the right to a French-language education, a battle for French-language education rights that is recent history in Ontario, and a current massive barrier to providing an equal education in Ontario that was created by the previous government and that the current government is failing to address even though solutions are already identified, you can understand why Franco-Ontarians are deeply concerned that Bill 98 does not respect their constitutional right to manage their own education system and that the changes proposed by the bill in fact have the potential to take us back to the days where Franco-Ontarians were forced into schools alongside anglo-Ontarians instead of having their own schools.

All of the partners in French-language education raised these concerns with the social policy committee—l'Association des enseignantes et enseignants franco-ontariens, l'Association des conseils scolaires des écoles publiques de l'Ontario, l'Association franco-ontarienne des conseils scolaires catholiques. All of them asked for amendments to the bill to respect the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and to respect the rights of Franco-Ontarians to manage their own education system, par et pour les francophones.

1740

And yet, the government voted against every single one of their amendments. The government wouldn't even allow amendments requiring consultation with Franco-Ontarians when the minister is imposing changes on school boards. This is perhaps not a surprise, because the minister didn't even consult Franco-Ontarians before tabling the legislation. And yet, their response when voting against all of the amendments requested by Franco-Ontarians was, "Just trust us."

I think you can see from the long history of French education in Ontario and the current refusal of the government to act to address the shortage of French-language teachers why "just trust us" doesn't fly with Franco-Ontarians. That's without even taking into account that this is a government that repeatedly adopted legislation that doesn't respect the charter rights of Ontarians and then spent hundreds of millions of dollars defending its right to trample the charter rights of Ontarians in court.

Il est complètement inacceptable que nous sommes dans une situation où le gouvernement est en train, encore une fois, d'ignorer les différences entre les systèmes d'éducation de langue anglaise et de langue française, d'ignorer le droit constitutionnel des Franco-Ontariens de gérer leur propre système d'éducation—un système par et pour des francophones. Il est inacceptable que le gouvernement n'a même pas consulté les partenaires d'éducation de langue française avant d'imposer ce projet de loi, et que le projet de loi donne au ministre le pouvoir d'imposer des règles qui peuvent nuire aux droits constitutionnels des enfants francophones. Et il est complètement inacceptable que le gouvernement n'a même pas accepté des amendements qui ont été demandés par les partenaires en éducation de langue française pour protéger les droits des Franco-Ontariens.

That is how you end up in court, and that is what is going to happen with the government's bill once again because they just won't listen.

Let's take a look at some of the amendments that francophone stakeholders asked for, Speaker. The first was that respect for section 23 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the right of Franco-Ontarians to be consulted be included in the text of the bill.

From l'ACÉPO: « L'ACÉPO veut rappeler au gouvernement que l'éducation en langue minoritaire en Ontario est protégée par l'article 23 de la Charte canadienne des droits et libertés. Aucune loi ou aucun règlement qui en découle ne peut mettre en péril les droits conférés par l'article 23 de la charte.... »

« Nous tenons à rappeler au gouvernement que l'ACÉPO ainsi que nos membres doivent être consultés de façon appropriée sur les détails des changements importants apportés au système d'éducation publique et sur les coûts directs et indirects pouvant découler du projet de loi 98 et des règlements découlant de ce projet de loi. »

De l'AFOCSC: « Nous tenons à souligner que la démarche de consultation devrait être un processus qui va au-delà du seul moment entourant l'adoption d'un projet de loi. La consultation entre le ministère de l'Éducation et

les associations qui représentent les conseils scolaires est un processus qui doit être continu afin que les points de vue des parties prenantes soient colligés et pris en considération de sorte qu'ils puissent véritablement influencer sur les décisions. La consultation ne retarde pas inutilement la prise de décision, mais l'éclaire, la facilite, l'oriente en fonction des réalités de chaque région, chaque communauté.

« Plusieurs articles du projet de loi 98 confèrent au ministre de l'Éducation ou au gouvernement des pouvoirs réglementaires. L'étendue des changements à venir est donc imprévisible au stade de l'adoption du projet de loi 98 puisque son plein effet ne se fera sentir que lorsque les règlements seront édictés. Puisque ces derniers risquent d'affecter les droits constitutionnels de ses membres (protégés par l'article 93 de la Loi constitutionnelle de 1867 et l'article 23 de la Charte canadienne des droits et libertés), l'AFOCSC demande à être consultée avant leur édicition. »

De l'AEFO : « L'amélioration des écoles et du rendement des élèves ne peut se faire sans tenir compte des particularités du système d'éducation en langue française; des particularités qui ne sont pas suffisamment prises en compte dans le projet de loi 98.

« Nous sommes confiantes aujourd'hui que vous saurez nous écouter et prendre des actions concrètes pour vous assurer de respecter vos obligations constitutionnelles envers l'éducation dans la langue de la minorité et d'offrir aux élèves francophones les mêmes opportunités que celles et ceux qui fréquentent les écoles de langue anglaise. »

De l'Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario : « Ces mesures, dépendant des modalités quant à leur mise en oeuvre, peuvent avoir des effets bénéfiques ou néfastes sur la francophonie ontarienne. Selon nous, il est souhaitable que le projet de loi rappelle l'importance du respect de l'article 23 de la Charte dans l'exercice des nouveaux pouvoirs du ministre. »

This is what the stakeholders asked for. And yet, what did the government do? Vote against every single amendment requiring consultation with Franco-Ontarians or adding respect for section 23 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to the bill.

The next issue was the power of the minister to regulate all activities by school boards. L'AFOCSC pointed out that the French school boards play a very specific role within communities that English schools seldom play:

« Il est important que les activités d'un conseil scolaire de langue française qui relèvent de son implication communautaire ne soient pas limitées par ce règlement et ne soient donc pas définies comme des activités commerciales. »

Comme la Cour suprême a noté dans le cas de Mahé contre Alberta : « Il convient de faire remarquer en outre que les écoles de la minorité servent elles-mêmes de centres communautaires qui peuvent favoriser l'épanouissement de la culture de la minorité linguistique et assurer sa préservation. Ce sont des lieux de rencontre dont les membres de la minorité ont besoin, des locaux où ils peuvent donner expression à leur culture. »

And yet, the government said, "Nope, no consultation with francophones necessary before we exercise that power," and voted against our amendment.

Then we have the issue of school properties. The bill gives the minister the power to compel school boards to sell properties or to share school facilities. Francophone stakeholders asked for amendments that would level the playing field between English and French school boards while respecting the constitutional right to French-language education in Ontario managed by francophones.

Because of their relatively recent creation and explosive growth, French-language school boards don't have the same property holdings that their English-language counterparts hold. Yet, while the minister insists that this is one of the reasons why we need this bill, the government members voted against every amendment that would actually ensure the bill was about levelling the playing field and not a fire sale of properties to developers or whatever else happens to capture the government's attention.

As the Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario said : « Les nouveaux pouvoirs du ministre à cet effet sont les bienvenus, tant et aussi longtemps que leur exercice s'effectue dans le respect de l'article 23 de la Charte. »

L'ACÉPO also recommended amending the bill to add the requirement that any moves by the minister to order the disposal of school properties or to require cohabitation between schools of different boards must respect article 23 of the charter. But guess what, Speaker? Having been told repeatedly that this was important to Franco-Ontarians, what did the government do? Vote against any mention of section 23.

In 2016, the Office of the French Language Services Commissioner of Ontario recommended that the Ministry of Education introduce legislation to prohibit the subdividing of school lands, which creates unfair competition between school boards in the private sector and makes lands much more difficult to build a school on, let alone a facility of equivalent quality to what English school boards had. The Liberals and the Conservatives have repeatedly ignored that recommendation, so L'ACÉPO asked for it to be added to this section on school properties. If you're going to exercise greater control over school properties and claim that you have to do it in the name of fairness between school boards, then surely you'd want to act on that recommendation now, right? And yet, what did the government do? Vote against that amendment.

Franco-Ontarians asked the government for amendments that acknowledge and respect that child care is essential to the transmission of language and culture and that many children who attend French-language child care in a French-language school building would go on to attend that French-language school, and to make it clear in the legislation that the minister will not force a school board to sell a property if it is being used for French-language child care. What did the government do? Vote against that amendment.

And perhaps most concerningly, given the history of French-language education in Ontario, when francophone

stakeholders asked the government to either not force the cohabitation of schools between school boards or at least limit that power to reflect the rights of francophone schools under section 23—and I've already explained the disastrous history of cohabitation for the francophone population of Ontario.

As l'AFOCSC says: « Cet argument a été proposé à maintes reprises au cours des dernières années. Des projets ont été tentés volontairement, d'autres ont été imposés par le ministère. Aucune histoire à succès ne s'est illustrée de ces tentatives. »

« Le partage d'installations avec des entités anglophones augmente l'assimilation des communautés francophones et doit être prohibé. »

1750

L'association note aussi que « les multiples jugements rendus en faveur des conseils scolaires de langue française par la Cour suprême du Canada confirment l'obligation légale des gouvernements de fournir les moyens financiers nécessaires aux conseils scolaires pour réaliser la construction pour leurs communautés d'installations équivalentes à celles de la majorité. »

Selon l'ACÉPO : « Il serait contraire à l'article 23 de la Charte que les conseils de la minorité linguistique soient forcés de partager le contrôle et la gestion de certaines de leurs écoles avec des conseils de la majorité linguistique. Qui plus est, l'article 23 de la Charte prévoit que lorsque le nombre d'élèves le justifie, les enfants des titulaires de droits ont droit à leur propre établissement d'instruction dans lequel ils peuvent évoluer dans un environnement de langue française homogène. Une cohabitation avec les enfants qui interagissent et étudient dans la langue de la majorité serait contraire à l'article 23 de la Charte dans un tel cas. »

And yet, would the government permit even a recognition of section 23 here? Nope. Once again, they voted against this amendment. They know the history of French-language education in Ontario, they know what the charter says, they heard the pleas of Franco-Ontarians, and they still refuse to recognize both the right and the importance of Franco-Ontarians to their own schools to protect their language and culture.

Another area where francophone partners flag that the government will end up doing damage by treating everyone the same is in the area of collaboration with municipalities. Bill 98 requires school boards to collaborate with municipalities—which, by the way, they are already doing—but this formalization of the requirement to collaborate is very different for English and French school boards. There are 31 English public school boards but only four French public school boards that have to cover that exact same territory. This means that the demands on a French-language school board to collaborate with every municipality in its boundaries is just not the same.

Conseil scolaire Viamonde serves nearly 200 municipalities that are covered by a total of 35 English-language school boards and two French Catholic school boards. Conseil scolaire Viamonde could just work full-

time on collaborating on child care planning with that kind of workload. But the government refused to take into account any kind of difference in the nature of the demand and recognize that the requirement should not impose an undue burden on French-language school boards.

We see the same refusal to actually take into account the differing realities of French-language education with the curriculum reviews here in Bill 98.

Il y a quelques semaines, j'ai eu le plaisir de rencontrer des jeunes leaders francophones de partout dans la province à la Maison de la francophonie dans ma circonscription d'Ottawa-Ouest-Nepean au sein d'une rencontre de la FESFO, la Fédération de la jeunesse franco-ontarienne. Et j'ai demandé à chaque personne que j'ai rencontrée, quels sont les plus grands défis ou les plus grands enjeux pour eux? Chaque étudiant m'a expliqué que le manque de ressources en français est un très grand défi. Ils sont aux écoles secondaires de langue française, mais ils doivent utiliser des ressources en anglais ou des ressources qui ont été créées en anglais et puis mal traduites en français.

Si nous ne donnons pas le temps nécessaire aux conseils scolaires francophones ni les ressources nécessaires, et si les francophones ne sont pas consultés pendant la révision du curriculum, nous continuerons d'avoir des écoles de langue française qui doivent utiliser des ressources en anglais, et ça nuit au droit constitutionnel d'avoir une éducation équitable dans la langue minoritaire. Mais, le gouvernement a, encore une fois, voté contre notre amendement.

Finally, the francophone school boards raised concerns about the government giving itself the power to intervene in the performance reviews for directors of education. This is a move that all school boards raised concerns about, Speaker, because directors of education are the sole employee of school boards. It is their job to oversee the performance of the director of education. But for francophone school boards, there is an additional concern here, a constitutional one.

Selon L'AFOCSC : « La direction générale d'un conseil scolaire est sous son contrôle exclusif en vertu de l'article 23 de la Charte. La Cour suprême du Canada est claire : les conseils scolaires de langue française ont le pouvoir exclusif relatif à "la nomination et la direction des personnes chargées de l'administration" des écoles de langue française. »

Le « pouvoir exclusif », mais voilà que le ministre s'insère dans le processus avec ce projet de loi. C'est avec des changements comme ça que ce projet de loi se termine en cour. Mais encore une fois, et même avec cet avertissement, le gouvernement a voté contre notre amendement qui aurait respecté le droit constitutionnel des Franco-Ontariens.

This is already a lot of rights being ignored by one piece of legislation, Speaker. I wish I could end things here, but sadly, what we see is that the government has ignored feedback from another significant group of Ontarians who have the right to an equitable education and have the right to accommodations and accessibility that are completely

forgotten by this piece of legislation, and that is students and parents with disabilities.

One in every six students in Ontario has a disability, but as the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act Alliance said in their brief to the committee, “Ontario’s K-12 education system is largely designed and operated as if it is principally for students without disabilities. Students with disabilities are too often treated as an afterthought. Special education is the inadequate form that the afterthought largely takes.”

In 2017, the government created a committee to review the education system in Ontario from the perspective of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act in order to identify barriers in the education system and address them to meet the goal of making Ontario barrier-free by 2025. That committee tabled its final report in January 2022; however, since then the government has not acted on the report or taken any steps to address accessibility in Ontario schools. The government has not directed school boards to act on the report or provided any kind of timeline for enacting an education accessibility standard.

When the AODA Alliance asked school boards what action that they’ve taken in response to the report, the most common response from school boards was that they’re waiting on direction from the Ministry of Education. That direction has not been forthcoming.

And so, Speaker, as the AODA Alliance told the committee in their brief: “At present, nothing in Bill 98 requires the minister or school boards to do anything new to remove and prevent disability barriers so that students with disabilities can fully benefit from, fully participate in, and be fully included in all that Ontario K-12 schools have to offer. Nothing in the bill requires the minister to do anything ... to improve Ontario’s K-12 education system for vulnerable, chronically disadvantaged students with disabilities.”

The AODA Alliance urged a series of amendments to ensure that the new powers that the minister is giving himself would be used to improve accessibility for students with disabilities. These amendments boil down to two core principles: (1) that the minister would ensure that any direction to school boards for specific measures “ensure that students with disabilities will be fully included in and fully benefit from the educational activities and reform measures to which the minister’s direction relates,” and (2) that the minister would be “required to issue directions to school boards within prescribed timelines for the removal and prevention of recurring disability barriers which the K-12 Education Standards Development Committee report addresses.”

The amendments that the AODA Alliance recommended were the most strongly recommended amendments that the committee received. We received letters of support for these amendments from Easter Seals, March of Dimes, the ARCH Disability Law Centre, the Ontario Autism Coalition, the Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital, the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario, Ontario Parents of Visually Impaired Children

and many, many individuals who took the time to write in to the committee.

We put forward 15 amendments based on the AODA Alliance’s input and the request of so many stakeholders, including, just the simple request that the government consult with people living with disabilities. And yet despite their pleas, despite the fact that we are supposed to be making Ontario barrier-free for persons living with disabilities by 2025, which is just two years away now, the government voted against every single one of the AODA Alliance’s amendments—every single one.

As the education critic for the Ontario NDP, one of the issues I hear about most from parents is the ways in which the government is failing students with disabilities in the province. The government is not providing even remotely sufficient funding to meet their needs. The Toronto District School Board is spending \$67.6 million more on special education than what they are getting from the province. The Lambton Kent District School Board reported that they are only getting enough funding—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I apologize. I know the member knew that was coming. It is 6 o’clock, and I need to interrupt the debate to move to private members’ public business.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

1800

PRIVATE MEMBERS’ PUBLIC BUSINESS

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Ms. Christine Hogarth: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should adopt mechanisms for disclosure outlined in Clare’s Law to make information relating to intimate partner violence convictions accessible to at-risk individuals who are seeking this information on a confidential basis in order to make informed decisions for themselves and their families.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Pursuant to standing order 100, the member has 12 minutes for her presentation.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: First of all, I’d like to introduce a few people who are in the gallery today, Priya Shatri, Abi Ajibolade and Alexandra Nicu. Thank you very much for the work you do for women every single day.

I would like to begin my remarks today to praise someone most members of this House would likely never have heard of but to whom many people owe a great deal. If you’re wondering why I would like to do that as we debate so grave and important an issue, it will become apparent in a few moments. That’s because, without him, we wouldn’t be here today discussing Clare’s Law. His name was Michael Brown, and much of the Western world owes him a debt of gratitude. Let me tell you why.

Michael Brown was born in 1943 in Aberdeen, Scotland. He left school at the age of 15 to join the postwar

Royal Air Force. After leaving the RAF, he spent more than 20 years on North Sea supply and other vessels. Later, he married and had two daughters. The marriage didn't last, though, and after a while, he wed a divorcee who had two children. Being a man with a big heart, he adopted her son and daughter as his own.

At around that time, his stepdaughter began seeing a man to whom Michael immediately took a dislike. He was rough. He seemed angry. But Michael Brown let her go on her way as a now-grown woman. Still, he worried there was more to her partner than met the eye, something that seemed much more troubling—maybe even dangerous. Regardless, soon she was pregnant, and shortly after, she was dead of strangulation and her body had been set on fire by her boyfriend.

According to Michael Brown's obituary in the Scotsman newspaper, he was forever after consumed with guilt that had he known about his stepdaughter's killer and his violent past, he may have been able to somehow prevent her murder.

Michael Brown spent the next several years campaigning publicly for laws that may spare other women who would, or could, become victims of intimate partner violence. The outcome of this tireless effort was called the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme. It was adopted in Britain and Wales—the UK—then Australia, then here, in the provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. But with time, it became better known as Clare's Law, because, you see, Michael Brown's much-loved adopted daughter was Clare.

In essence, Clare's Law would empower those who feel threatened by a current or ex-partner whom they suspect of violent past behaviour to access such information on such past conduct from the police. This is important: Clare Wood did not know about her boyfriend's prior record of violence, but the local police did. If Clare had known, she may have made different choices, but she didn't—and she paid the ultimate price in not knowing. In so many ways that would traumatize her stepfather for the rest of his life.

To conclude this part of my remarks, Speaker, I would note that Michael Brown died in 2020. The legacy he left behind touched—and likely saved—the lives of countless women who had lived in perpetual fear of intimate partner violence. He campaigned relentlessly for a rule or a law that would enable those in fear of violence from their current or ex-intimate partners to be forewarned about the risks they faced.

I believe it is now Ontario's turn to embrace his legacy, too, because as the late Michael Brown said himself after his first triumph in the UK, "I haven't done any of this for plaudits. But if I could have saved one other person from suffering then it will be worth it."

Speaker, I'd now like to turn to my motion before the House.

But first, I want to recognize the member across the aisle from St. Catharines for her work on this legislation. I know that we looked at your legislation, we put it forward. So I thank you for your work on this topic.

Some people may have rightly asked why a motion and not a bill; it's because, as much as I would like to see

legislation enacted yesterday or last year on this matter, I know we still have some work to do before it reaches that stage. That's because, as commonsensical as it is, there are basically two issues embedded in the idea which we must take care to adapt—from the approach of other jurisdictions—to fit the legal realities of Ontario. Boiled down, they are twofold. The first is privacy; that is, the extent to which a person's criminal or other background can be sought and obtained by someone who fears they may be endangered by an intimate partner or ex-partner, simply by asking for it. The second and related issue is disclosure; that is, under what circumstances police can disclose this information, and to what extent.

We need to ensure that this government examines the experience with a Clare's Law elsewhere, absorbs their best practices and tailors them to fit the realities right here in Ontario. It's called "doing your homework." It's a prudent approach to take—hence a motion, not a fully formed piece of legislation, and I think as a starting point towards a thoughtful and effective approach to the scourge of intimate partner violence.

Let's touch briefly on some of the key complexities we would need to address, starting with the protection of the would-be perpetrator's privacy and the rules of police disclosure of information to those who fear violence.

First, as we see it now, there must be safeguards in place to ensure that any police disclosure would not contain personal information. There would be a potential risk to information sources, victims and perpetrators if that kind of written information is used outside of the purposes governing an Ontario Clare's Law.

Second, the person applying for access to this information must be advised that any such information disclosed by the police must be kept confidential and can only be used for its intended purpose, which is to enable the applicant to take the necessary steps to protect his or her own safety. Applicants would be required to sign an agreement to this effect. Next, the ways by which the relevant experts could assess the extent of the risk in each case—Saskatchewan, for example, has created a review committee for this purpose, made up of police forces, victims' services and the provincial associations of transition houses. This body is charged with assessing risk in each case as submitted by the police, to determine if disclosure is warranted.

And third, what would classify an application for this information as either of concern or of no concern? In the case of the Saskatchewan model, it would be up to the police to discontinue an application if they are not convinced of legitimacy for a variety of reasons. These would include:

- credibility concerns about the applicant;
- whether the application has been made for some reasons other than personal protection; and
- if there is in fact not a close personal relationship between the parties.

Speaker, I say again that all this is not a definitive solution as yet. Much work remains to ensure that each of these matters is addressed, and that any future legislation to enact a Clare's Law in Ontario would need to be adapted

to this province's circumstances and legal requirements. But it's a start—a start, I would submit, worthy of support from each and every member of this House.

Speaking personally, I would want to know if my partner had a violent past. I would want to know this on behalf of my loved ones, my children, because I would be protecting not just myself but them as well. I would want to have the opportunity, the choice, to make an informed decision about these circumstances and take action accordingly, if needed. But first, I would need to know what the sort of information is I'm looking for and what help is out there and even if it's available in the first place. Wouldn't you? Because the fact is, there are many people out there, many victims of intimate partner violence, who actually do not know where to turn for help. Either that, or they're silenced because of some sort of financial dependency on their abuser.

1810

So I say to the members of this House, Speaker, that with their support of this motion, we can make a start towards giving these long-neglected victims of cruelty the lifeline that they so desperately need, as well as to honour the memories of both Clare and Michael Brown.

Ladies and gentlemen, let's make some noise, and let us begin.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Further debate?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I rise today to address a critical issue that weighs heavily on our communities: intimate partner violence. It is a matter that transcends demographics, socio-economic status, ethnicity or age. It is pervasive, destructive, and it has grave consequences on individuals, families and communities at large.

Ending gender-based violence in Canada is of paramount importance because it is a fundamental human rights issue and public health concern. It's not only causing immediate physical harm but it also results in long-term psychological and emotional trauma, contributing to social issues such as homelessness, poverty and mental health disorders.

Moreover, gender-based violence perpetuates inequality, preventing individuals, especially women and LGBTQ2+ people, from fully participating in all aspects of society. By addressing and ending gender-based violence, Canada can enhance the well-being of all its citizens, promote gender equality and foster healthier, more equitable communities.

The eradication of this violence is a crucial step towards ensuring that all individuals can live without fear and with dignity and respect. The motion proposed today addresses one part of—providing one tool for—addressing intimate partner violence.

I was proud to be the first in the province of Ontario to propose this legislation in 2021. When I spoke to my community, I saw a landscape of inter-partner violence becoming endemic. The year I proposed the legislation, 58 women had lost their lives to intimate partner violence in Canada.

Speaker, every member of this House will recall that COVID-19 created an increase in distress and isolation.

Described by the Canadian Red Cross at the time as the shadow pandemic: the increased sexual and gender-based violence. There was a 20% to 30% increase in sexual and gender-based violence. The Ontario association of interval houses reported that 20% of their 70 shelters had seen an increase in this crisis.

It was in the wake of 2019 that Canada police services had been ringing the alarm bells that 100,000 victims of intimate partner violence reported to them. To put that into perspective, these reported incidents accounted for around 30% of all police-reported violent crimes that year in the country. Those crimes disproportionately impacted women.

Speaker, apart from the rising prevalence of gender-based violence, there was a personal reason for me related to bringing Clare's Law forward in 2021. Up until this point, I can honestly say I've not discussed it in this chamber. I lost a family friend, very close to me, a member of my community, because of inter-partner violence. She was remarkable. She was an amazing mother, someone who you could count on to always be there and to always try her best. One day, her partner came home upset at their situation and violently took her life.

I recognize that Clare's Law might not have spared her, recognizing even if it existed and she used the disclosure tool, what happened that day was never going to be her fault. However, I wanted to provide that extra tool that may have contributed to preventing a heinous crime. In our journey towards a safer, more equitable society, Clare's Law is a single tool that offers potential victims of domestic violence a life-saving tool. The legislation is one tool in the tool box against gender-based violence, and while it requires considerable consultation alongside the community, I also saw it as an opportunity to create space and to talk about preventing gender-based violence as a whole.

When I consulted with the sector—my local women's shelter, Gillian's Place; provincial interval and transition homes; rape crisis centres; Indigenous leaders in my community; the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police; legal experts and others—it became clear to me that Clare's Law here in Canada is helpful. We must also acknowledge that it is not a panacea for the scourge of intimate partner violence.

There are two elements of my proposed bill that I hope to see, after meaningful consultation with the community, remain intact when the ministry evaluates this tool in the future. The first is deputizing appointed third-party representatives to make the interpersonal disclosure to police on their behalf. Alberta uses a similar approach. We have to recognize that trust for police services is uneven across all communities, and while this tool might never be utilized for all communities, it at least provides an opportunity to empower a third-party applicant—an organization an individual can trust to allow access to interpersonal disclosure.

Another important component of the previous legislation that I hope is parlayed is explicit language preventing victim blaming. If an individual does not have the resources, knowledge or trust to pursue interpersonal

disclosure, it should not be held against them. In no short terms, no police force and no government agency or office may deny access to service or protection for an applicant or person at risk who receives disclosure information and remains in their relationship on the basis that the applicant or person at risk remained in the relationship.

Finally, it brings me to a big capital M, motivation, with bringing forward this legislation originally. It is important to amplify that gender-based violence is endemic, that we are in a crisis, and tools like Clare's Law and many of the recommendations from the Renfrew county inquest are important, but we must continue to advocate for and invest in comprehensive support services.

I credit my colleagues in Toronto Centre and Toronto–St. Paul's for doing an excellent job in bringing forward the big-ticket items we need to address. Clare's Law is a reasonably inexpensive contribution to solving this problem, but we must also look to solutions that require real funding and support. This includes financial assistance, safe housing options, counselling services and legal supports, formally declaring intimate partner violence as an epidemic and annualizing funding for the organizations in the sector that are on the front line so they can make tangible long-term plans. These services ensure that individuals have the necessary resources to leave dangerous situations and start anew.

Even though Clare's Law provides an avenue for individuals to potentially escape dangerous situations, its effectiveness is predicated on the potential victim's ability to act. This requires not just awareness of the danger, but also the resources, supports and confidence to remove oneself from a harmful situation. Many victims may lack these due to financial instability, fear of escalation or societal pressure.

Once again, we must continue to advocate for and invest in comprehensive support services. This includes financial assistance, safe housing options, counselling services and legal support. These services ensure that individuals have the necessary resources to leave dangerous situations.

Third, we need to push for widespread education on healthy relationships and warning signs of abuse. Schools, workplaces and community centres should be platforms for such education. Early intervention is key, and knowledge is so, so powerful. By equipping our young people with this understanding, we can hope to break the cycle of this abuse.

1820

Lastly, we must encourage societal shifts. Intimate partner violence thrives in the shadows of silence. Encouraging open conversations, challenging victim-blaming narratives and fostering a society where it is safe to speak up and to ask for help: This is so vital. To sum up Clare's Law, it is undoubtedly an important tool in our fight against intimate partner violence. However, let it serve as a stepping stone rather than a solution.

I will be supporting this motion, as I proposed this as a bill in 2021. It is a positive step that the government is looking for more ways to combat intimate partner

violence. Let it be a call to action that galvanizes us into taking a more holistic, encompassing approach—one that includes substantial and meaningful consultation using resources the ministry has to work alongside the sector.

The preamble in the original bill was written with feminized language that addresses the fact that while reform to disclosure, like Clare's Law, has value, the sector of experts for gender-based violence and the people that they are advocating for require resources and consultation.

I encourage the government to review these words that were in the preamble to the previous bill, but more importantly, to act on them. I will read the preamble now:

“Gender-based violence is an endemic and entrenched social issue in all communities in Ontario. Different communities require different strategies to reduce, prevent and respond to gender-based violence so a multi-faceted approach to addressing gender-based violence is needed. In addition to strong laws and law enforcement, survivors of gender-based violence require access to community support and counselling services, safe and affordable housing, including shelters, income support, mental health support and child care to ensure they have the resources necessary to leave unsafe situations safely. These services require adequate and sustained funding on an annualized basis.

“It is also important to recognize that many stereotypes, myths and other misinformation about gender-based violence still exist within the criminal justice system and must be addressed to ensure survivors are protected by these systems.

“For any law reform in this area to be successful, those interpreting and enforcing the law, including police, lawyers and judges, require education and training to ensure they have an adequate understanding of gender-based violence.

“An important additional tool to help protect against gender-based violence”—the road ahead is long, but together, with a concerted effort, we can make Ontario safer, and together we can make Ontario free from the shadows of intimate partner violence.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Further debate?

Ms. Donna Skelly: I rise today to speak in support of this motion to create new protections against intimate partner violence in Ontario.

Since 2018, our government has taken action to protect the most vulnerable from those who seek to do them harm. Last December, we announced \$2 million in funding to help break the cycle of intimate partner violence by supporting specialized education and counselling for people mandated by courts to receive it. Earlier this year, we announced an investment of \$6.5 million to help women and children who have survived violence or human trafficking access the supports they need to stay safe and rebuild their lives. This action builds on the province's \$307-million anti-human trafficking strategy, which seeks to raise awareness, support early intervention and punish perpetrators.

Madam Speaker, our government's commitment to protecting women, children and the most vulnerable is steadfast. Tragically, the continued victimization of vulnerable people, including at the hands of their partners, means that more needs to be done. This motion is an opportunity to take an important next step towards preventing further harm by adopting mechanisms contained in Clare's Law to protect against intimate partner violence.

Clare's Law, as you heard, was first enacted in the United Kingdom in 2014. The law was inspired by the advocacy of Michael Brown, a Royal Air Force veteran whose daughter, Clare, was strangled to death by her ex-boyfriend in 2009. Clare's killer had a substantial criminal history of violence against women. But Clare was not aware of this and at the time had no way to find out that the person she was in a relationship with was a violent and dangerous man. Without this information Clare was unable to make an informed decision to protect herself. In the wake of this horrific and preventable crime, Clare's father, Michael, campaigned for a law that would allow such information to be made accessible, so that women like Clare would have the chance to get themselves out of a dangerous situation before it was too late.

Michael's goal was finally achieved when Clare's Law was created. The legislation contains information-disclosure mechanisms that create a right to ask and a right to know about a partner's history of domestic violence.

A right to ask allows individuals to seek information from police regarding whether or not their partner or former partner has a history of domestic violence.

A right to know allows police to proactively provide such information to someone if they believe that person is at risk of being victimized.

In the years since the legislation was first introduced in the UK, several Canadian provinces have passed their own versions of Clare's Law. Madam Speaker, introducing similar legislation year in Ontario could save lives. According to the Domestic Violence Death Review Committee, 72% of cases reviewed between 2003 and 2017 involved a perpetrator with a known history of domestic violence. Enacting the changes outlined in Clare's Law would empower Ontarians with the information they need to protect themselves from dangerous partners.

Madam Speaker, I will be supporting this motion. Let us honour Clare's life and the legacy of Michael Brown's advocacy to prevent further tragedies like the one his family suffered.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Further debate?

Mr. Lorne Coe: I would like to thank them member from Etobicoke-Lakeshore for bringing forward this motion because clearly we need to create mechanisms for disclosure for individuals at risk so that they are able to make informed decisions about their safety and security.

According to Victim Services of Durham Region, intimate partner violence has increased by more than seven times from what it was in 2019. Sexual violence has increased by more than six times since 2019.

Abuse can begin subtly for many people who experience it. This may make abusive behaviours difficult

to discern in some cases, especially during the onset. Being hurt by an intimate partner or spouse can be a very confusing, traumatizing experience for survivors of domestic abuse. "How could the person I love hurt me?"; "Why am I afraid of the person who is supposed to protect me?"; "I was abused before; I don't want to face this pain again": These are some of the thoughts which erupt in the minds of the victims.

The Durham Regional Police Service defines intimate partner violence as multiple forms of harm caused by a current or former intimate partner or spouse with intentions of controlling another person's behaviour. The region of Durham has many organizations helping victims and survivors, such as Luke's Place and The Denise House, which provide timely support to victims of intimate partner violence.

One of the other organizations is Victim Services of Durham Region. I spoke recently, at a tribute to those who have experienced intimate partner violence, to Krista MacNeil, the executive director of Victim Services of Durham Region. Krista had this to say, and I think it's important for us all to hear: "Prevention entails the provision of a psychoeducation and knowledge on the cycle of abuse so that victims are equipped to make informed decisions." That's what we're discussing tonight, isn't it?

"In the Renfrew county inquest, which highlighted the femicides of three women, all murdered at the hands of the same former partner, the provision of information relating to the risk they faced may have helped save lives. With this in mind, careful consideration is needed to ensure the privacy of former victims. Providing life-saving information to victims is important, if not crucial."

1830

What's clear, Speaker, is that our government is empowering, as we should, the victims, the individuals at risk, the vulnerable. I urge all members of this House to pass this motion for the protection of victims of intimate partner violence—for themselves and for their families.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Further debate?

Mr. Billy Pang: It is my honour to rise and support the member for Etobicoke-Lakeshore regarding the disclosure of information on intimate partner violence convictions. This motion seeks to adopt mechanisms outlined in Clare's Law, empowering individuals at risk to access vital information confidentially. This will enable them to make informed decisions for themselves and their families.

Intimate partner violence is a grave issue that affects far too many lives in our province. The World Health Organization also identifies intimate partner violence as a major global public health concern, as it affects millions of people and can result in long-lasting consequences. The devastating consequences of such violence can ripple through families, perpetuating cycles of abuse and pain. It is imperative that we take meaningful steps towards addressing this issue head-on. We need to provide avenues for support and protection to those who need it most.

Clare's Law has already proven effective in other jurisdictions within and outside of Canada. This law

recognizes the fundamental right of individuals to access information about their potential partners' history of intimate partner violence convictions. By adopting mechanisms for disclosure as outlined in Clare's Law, we will empower individuals to make informed choices regarding their personal safety and the safety of their loved ones.

This motion strikes a delicate balance between privacy concerns and the critical need for protection against intimate partner violence. By implementing confidential mechanisms for accessing this information, we ensure that at-risk individuals have the resources they need to make informed decisions without compromising their safety or privacy. The mechanisms also respect the privacy of the person in question, as well as that of the person seeking the information.

Knowledge is power, and by providing access to information, we equip individuals with the tools to assess potential risks and make choices that protect themselves and their families. By adopting mechanisms for disclosure, we create a society that prioritizes the safety and well-being of its citizens. This government has the duty to address the root causes of intimate partner violence and to provide survivors and those at risk with the tools they need to break free from cycles of abuse. By adopting mechanisms for disclosure outlined in Clare's Law, we make a significant step forward in promoting safety, empowerment and accountability within our communities.

In conclusion, I fully support MPP Hogarth's motion to adopt mechanisms for disclosure outlined in Clare's Law. The motion demonstrates our government's commitment to safeguarding the well-being of all individuals in our province. Let us create a safer and more compassionate Ontario for all.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): There is now time for the member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore to respond or reply.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: I want to thank the member from St. Catharines, the member from Flamborough–Glanbrook, the member from Whitby and the member from Markham–Unionville, and the ladies in the audience

for the work that you do each and every day. For those who are watching who may be a victim of abuse, please know there is help out there—please know there is help out there. We hear far too many stories; we hear them all each and every day. There are things we can do—we know more now—to help out people and make them feel better and save some lives.

It's interesting, today we are wearing these ALS pins. Every piece of legislation I've done in this House, my mom has been a part of, and she helped me in the beginning of this legislation when we were working on it together. On March 13, my mother passed away from ALS, so wearing this pin, it seems sort of, I don't know—maybe something's in the air.

The last couple weeks of my mom's life, she couldn't speak, so she would just give us a thumbs-up when things were good. I think she's giving us a thumbs-up today that this was a good move, and I appreciate everyone's support on this legislation.

Today we have an opportunity to do the right thing. We have the opportunity to create Clare's Law. The time is now. Let's take this first step forward together.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

Ms. Hogarth has moved private member's notice of motion number 50. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion, please say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

A recorded vote being required, it will be deferred until the next instance of deferred votes.

Vote deferred.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): All matters relating to private members' public business having been completed, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow, Wednesday, June 7, at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1837.

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Burch, Jeff (NDP)	Niagara Centre / Niagara-Centre	
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Cho, Hon. / L'hon. Stan (PC)	Willowdale	Associate Minister of Transportation / Ministre associé des Transports
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Dixon, Jess (PC)	Kitchener South—Hespeler / Kitchener-Sud—Hespeler	
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Dunlop, Hon. / L'hon. Jill (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	Minister of Colleges and Universities / Ministre des Collèges et Universités
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Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Ghamari, Goldie (PC)	Carleton	
Gill, Hon. / L'hon. Parm (PC)	Milton	Minister of Red Tape Reduction / Ministre de la Réduction des formalités administratives
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Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	
Grewal, Hardeep Singh (PC)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Harden, Joel (NDP)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
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Hogarth, Christine (PC)	Etobicoke—Lakeshore	
Holland, Kevin (PC)	Thunder Bay—Atikokan	
Hsu, Ted (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	
Jama, Sarah (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	
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Jordan, John (PC)	Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston	
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Leardi, Anthony (PC)	Essex	
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Lumsden, Hon. / L'hon. Neil (PC)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean	
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McCarthy, Todd J. (PC)	Durham	
McGregor, Graham (PC)	Brampton North / Brampton-Nord	
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Pasma, Chandra (NDP)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest—Nepean	
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Pierre, Natalie (PC)	Burlington	
Pirie, Hon. / L'hon. George (PC)	Timmins	Minister of Mines / Ministre des Mines
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Rae, Matthew (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP)	Humber River—Black Creek	
Rasheed, Hon. / L'hon. Kaled (PC)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery / Ministre des Services au public et aux entreprises
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Romano, Ross (PC)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	President of the Treasury Board / Président du Conseil du Trésor
Sarrazin, Stéphane (PC)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Saunderson, Brian (PC)	Simcoe—Grey	
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
Shamji, Adil (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
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Smith, David (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Graydon (PC)	Parry Sound—Muskoka	Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Smith, Laura (PC)	Thornhill	
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
Tangri, Hon. / L'hon. Nina (PC)	Mississauga—Streetsville	Associate Minister of Housing / Ministre associée du Logement
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain / Hamilton-Mountain	
Thanigasalam, Vijay (PC)	Scarborough—Rouge Park	
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Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC)	Vaughan—Woodbridge	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions / Ministre associé délégué au dossier de la Santé mentale et de la Lutte contre les dépendances
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Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	
West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	

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Wong-Tam, Kristyn (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	
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